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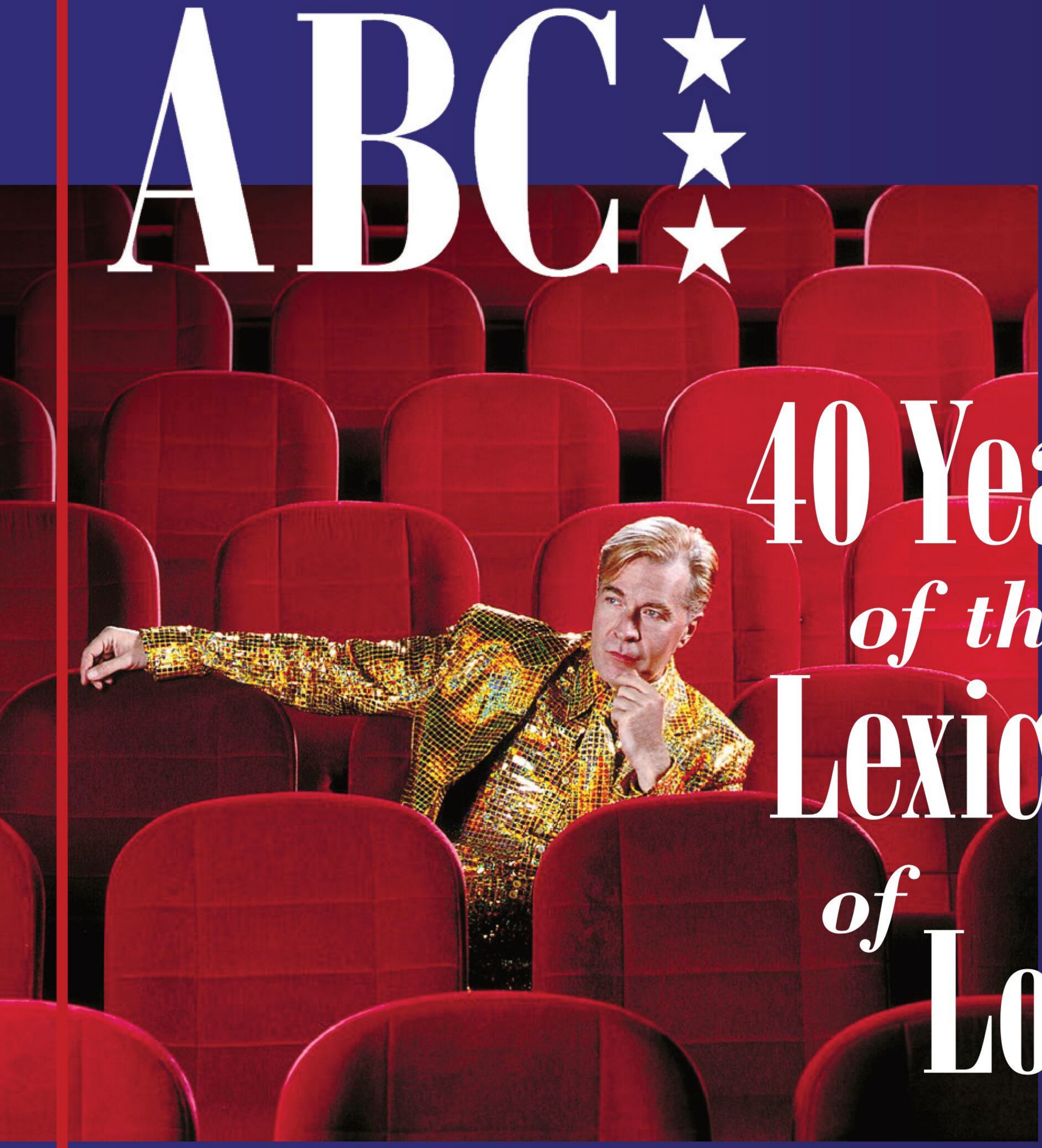
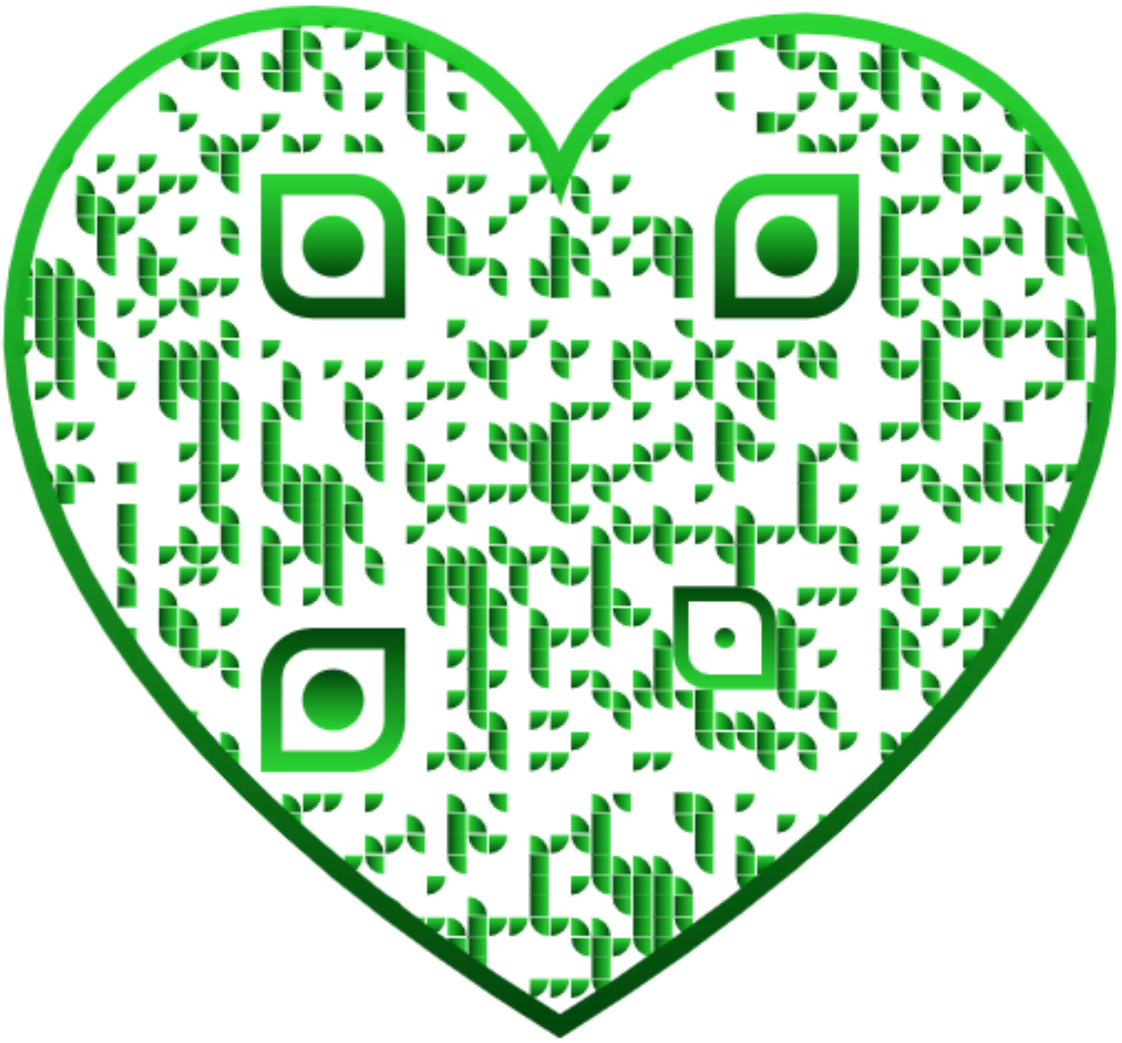


ABC

40 Years *of the* Lexicon of Love

KLAUS SCHULZE / DUBSTAR / 700 BLISS / THE SOUND OF SCIENCE / ZOMBIE ZOMBIE / BLUEDOT PREVIEW

SHOW ME



WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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Vice Versa were minor members of the so-called "synth brigade" when they appeared at the Futurama Festival in Leeds in September 1980. They were the fourth band to play on the Sunday, the second day of the weekend event, with around 20 more following afterwards. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate just how low down on the bill they were, the fourth band to play the previous day were The Boko Bobos. You get what we're saying here, right?

A few months on, Vice Versa gave their keyboard player Martin Fry a microphone and changed their name to ABC. A few more months on, they'd written a lot of new songs, signed to Phonogram Records, taken some advice from Trevor Horn and, believe it or not, chosen to ignore some other advice from David Bowie. When they released their debut album in June 1982, it went straight into the UK charts at Number One and stayed in the Top 100 for an entire year. Now that's a spectacularly steep ascent.

It's 40 years since 'The Lexicon Of Love', the album that took ABC from underground wannabes to global superstars, and we're delighted to have Martin Fry – resplendent in his iconic gold lamé suit – on the cover of this month's Electronic Sound. An unforgettable mix of intoxicating pop tunes, slick and funky rhythms, head-spinning strings and ultra-smart lyrics, every moment of 'Lexicon' still sounds brilliant to this day. Martin's memories of the early 80s, which he describes as "a whirlwind", certainly make for fascinating reading and we're confident that you're going to really enjoy our chat with him.

Our other features this month include Dubstar, 700 Bliss, Zombie Zombie, The Sound Of Science and, most notably, the last-ever UK interview with German electronic pioneer Klaus Schulze. A member of both Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel but best known for a prolific solo career that spanned five decades, Klaus completed a lengthy email interview with our journalist Jeremy Allen a few days before he died at the end of April. Just three weeks later, we also lost Vangelis, another giant of electronic music, and we pay tribute to the man responsible for the 'Blade Runner' soundtrack and albums like 'Albedo 0.39' in this issue too.

As we were about to go to press, we received more sad news with the announcement that Andy Fletcher from Depeche Mode had passed away. One of the group's founders, he played a key part in all their defining 1980s albums, including 'A Broken Frame' and 'Some Great Reward', as well as the colossal 'Violator' (1990) and 'Ultra' (1997). The tributes to Andy are still coming in as we write this, but we've been particularly struck by a tweet from Alison Moyet which says a huge amount about her old friend:

"I have just heard the news. Since we were 10. Same estate. Class mates to label mates. He who kept faith with all the old gang and they with him. It doesn't compute. Fletch. I have no words. #andyfletcher"

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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VANGELIS

29 March 1943 – 17 May 2022

Evángelos Odysséas Papathanassíou, best known to the world simply as Vangelis, was a colossus in the world of electronic music. He rocketed to international recognition in 1981 when his Oscar-winning score for 'Chariots Of Fire', a low-budget British film centred around running, enthralled the movie-going world. The opening theme, prosaically named 'Titles', was released as a single and outlandishly hit the Number One spot in the USA, as did the soundtrack album, selling a million copies in the process.

This spectacular success was, of course, built on an impressive back catalogue of collaborations, bands, solo albums and soundtrack work that stretched back to the 1960s.

Aphrodite's Child, the quartet he formed in 1967 with vocalist Demis Roussos, relocated from their native Greece to Paris in 1968 (they were on their way to London, but visa trouble and the Paris riots held them up). They morphed from a baroque pop trio into a prog rock behemoth with the double album '666', released in 1972. Although it was evidence of the expansive vision Vangelis was developing, it effectively split Aphrodite's Child, thanks to its arduous recording process and Vangelis staying in the studio while the band toured – but it also put Vangelis on the radar of Yes frontman and future collaborator, Jon Anderson.

The success of Aphrodite's Child in mainland Europe, where they sold millions of records, allowed Vangelis to pursue his career as a solo artist and studio wizard. His inaugural film score, for 1973's sublime 'L'Apocalypse Des Animaux', was the first of several successful soundtracks for animal and nature-themed documentaries.

In 1975, he established Nemo Studios in London, near Marble Arch, which became his home-from-home and sonic laboratory. It was designed to feel more like a comfortable living space than a recording studio, and it was here that he produced his music for the next 13 years, including 'Heaven And Hell' (with Jon Anderson contributing lyrics and vocals), 'Albedo 0.39' and 'Spiral'. 'Heaven And Hell' established Vangelis as a symphonic electronic maverick, a master of synthesisers with an unbound imagination, while 'Albedo 0.39' is an electronic music staple. The opening track, 'Pulstar', is instantly recognisable, due to its ubiquity on any programme about space or science in the UK throughout the 1970s and beyond.

His work always seemed intrinsically filmic, emotive and grand. Even back in 1973, on 'L'Apocalypse Des Animaux', you can hear the very obvious roots of his 'Blade Runner' atmospherics on tracks like 'Création Du Monde'.

When he joined the film composers' A-list following 'Chariots Of Fire', his score for 1982's 'Blade Runner' sealed the synth deal for electronic music fans everywhere. Ridley Scott's lavish visuals, Philip K Dick's story and Vangelis' epic electronics combined to create perhaps the most influential and revered sci-fi film in cinema history. This era also gave him global hits with Jon Anderson, a partnership that endured into the 1990s, and he even found time to contribute synth solos for Suzanne Ciani's 1986 album, 'The Velocity Of Love'.

His success over the remaining decades of his productive life and career speaks for itself, and his final album, 2021's 'Juno To Jupiter', is as impressive and energetic as any of his previous work. He was an artist who reached his pomp in his late 20s, and stayed in that zone right until the end.

READER OFFER

Exclusive reader-only limited editions

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C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/abc to buy this release on its own for £7.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

ABC
‘Look Good Tonite’ / ‘Sixty Seconds Later’
Gold vinyl seven-inch

This month’s Reader Offer is an exclusive seven-inch featuring two tracks from ABC, neither of which have ever appeared on vinyl before

As seems only fitting, we’re celebrating the 40th anniversary of ABC’s ‘The Lexicon Of Love’ in fine style. Because as well as a very entertaining cover feature, we also have a fabulous seven-inch boasting two tracks from the effortlessly cool Sheffield band.

The A-side of our single is the uplifting and instantly catchy ‘Look Good Tonite’. We are talking classic ABC here. Frontman Martin Fry penned the song with American producer Rob Fusari, who first came to fame through his work with Lady Gaga and Destiny’s Child, during the sessions for ABC’s ‘The Lexicon Of Love II’ album in 2016.

“I warmed to Rob straight away and we quickly started writing together,” explains Martin. “I used the American spelling of ‘Tonite’ in the title as an acknowledgement of his input. It’s a love song, of sorts, which tentatively references ‘Romeo And Juliet’.”

The lyrics find the singer on the cusp of a big romantic decision – “Do I get down on my knees? / Do I get up and leave?” – and it’s somewhat surprising that the song didn’t make the final cut of ‘Lexicon II’. Martin has always been a fan of ‘Look Good Tonite’, though. He included it in ABC’s live set in 2017 and the track was issued as a free lockdown download on the group’s website in 2020, albeit only for 24 hours. He says he is excited about the prospect of it appearing on this month’s Electronic Sound seven-inch.

“It’s nice to have the song out there in the world,” he notes. “I like how these records have that element of exclusivity too. It reminds me of the way that you’d get a rare single back in the day. I used to love bootlegs of live performances – especially someone like David Bowie – and how they fed into the idea of having to have everything by an artist.”

Flip the disc over for the orchestral and gently funky ‘Sixty Seconds Later’, a track which is not only previously unreleased but also previously unheard. Martin wrote the song in around 2014 with Marcus Vere, keyboardist with fellow Sheffield outfit Living In A Box, and Charlie Mole, who is best known for film and television scores. Like Rob Fusari, they both played significant roles on ‘The Lexicon Of Love II’.

“Marcus is a friend of mine and Charlie is a brilliant strings arranger,” says Martin. “When we did ‘Lexicon II’, a couple of songs we’d written came off the shelf and we put them back in the oven. This was one of them.”

The track features some trademark Martin Fry wordplay. “Call me old fashioned / Call me outdated / Call me what the hell you like… / Call me, call me, call me tonight,” runs the chorus.

“I like the idea of what might happen in 60 seconds,” he adds. “A lot can happen in that time. Important decisions can be made.”

Or, as he puts it when he asks for “one minute of your time” in the track, “60 seconds later, you could be mine”.

So is this maybe the day that Martin finds true love? Well, you never know… but you probably shouldn’t hold your breath.

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SPINE OF THE TIMES

Vinyl storage, sorted

Toneoptic, a Los Angeles-based record storage company, have finally addressed the age-old problem of deciding which way is best to store and organise your vinyl. Do you go for library-style (spine facing out) or shop-style (cover facing out)?

It turns out you can have both. Their Toneoptic rpm vinyl cabinets are equipped with an inner plate that slides out and rotates 90 degrees. Each hand-crafted unit holds up to 75 records,and comes with two aluminium dividers and French cleat brackets for fixing to your wall. Available in white, walnut and solid walnut, one unit will set you back $1,800, but you have the option of paying in monthly instalments. Go on, treat yourself. You (and your records) are worth it. **toneoptic.com**

PULSE

COLLOBOH

Modular synthesist takes on Debussy

WHO THEY?

Colloboh is the stage name of Collins Oboh, an exciting LA-based artist you need to keep tabs on. Born in Nigeria, raised in Baltimore, the 26-year-old began making music on a cracked version of FL Studio (a story shared by many producers) before slowly moving up the electronic food chain to Eurorack. These days, his Instagram shows a thriving ecosystem of tangled wires and flashing hardware.

WHY COLLOBOH?

In 2021, Oboh's debut EP 'Entity Relation' gave us five IDM rollercoasters that whizzed and fizzed like a shaken up bottle of cola. Acid splurges met autotuned vocal samples and there were wubs aplenty. Leading track 'Borderline' sounds like Roy Davis Jr went to bed with Four Tet and something beautiful happened. But his forthcoming ambient EP is a collosal change of pace. A switched-on modular version of Debussy's 'Arabesque No 1', anyone? Following in the footsteps of Isao Tomita, who released his own much-revered rendition on 1974's 'Snowflakes Are Dancing', Oboh's latest release gives the well-known composition a minimalist makeover, balancing a sense of euphoria and melancholy with poise.

TELL US MORE...

Oboh moved to LA just five months ago, but is already forging important relationships in the city. 'Arabesque No 1' was mastered by Daddy Kev, founder of the city's influential club night Low End Theory, which helped launch the careers of producers Flying Lotus, Daedelus and Nosaj Thing, while 'Entity Relation' was mastered by rapper, producer and underground stalwart, Zeroh. "Yes!" replies Oboh enthusiastically when his name crops up. "He's the man. An incredibly talented engineer and artist who I'm grateful to work with. There are so many dope musicians in LA that I've already connected with. I usually prefer working by myself, but I'm learning to be a better collaborator."

ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

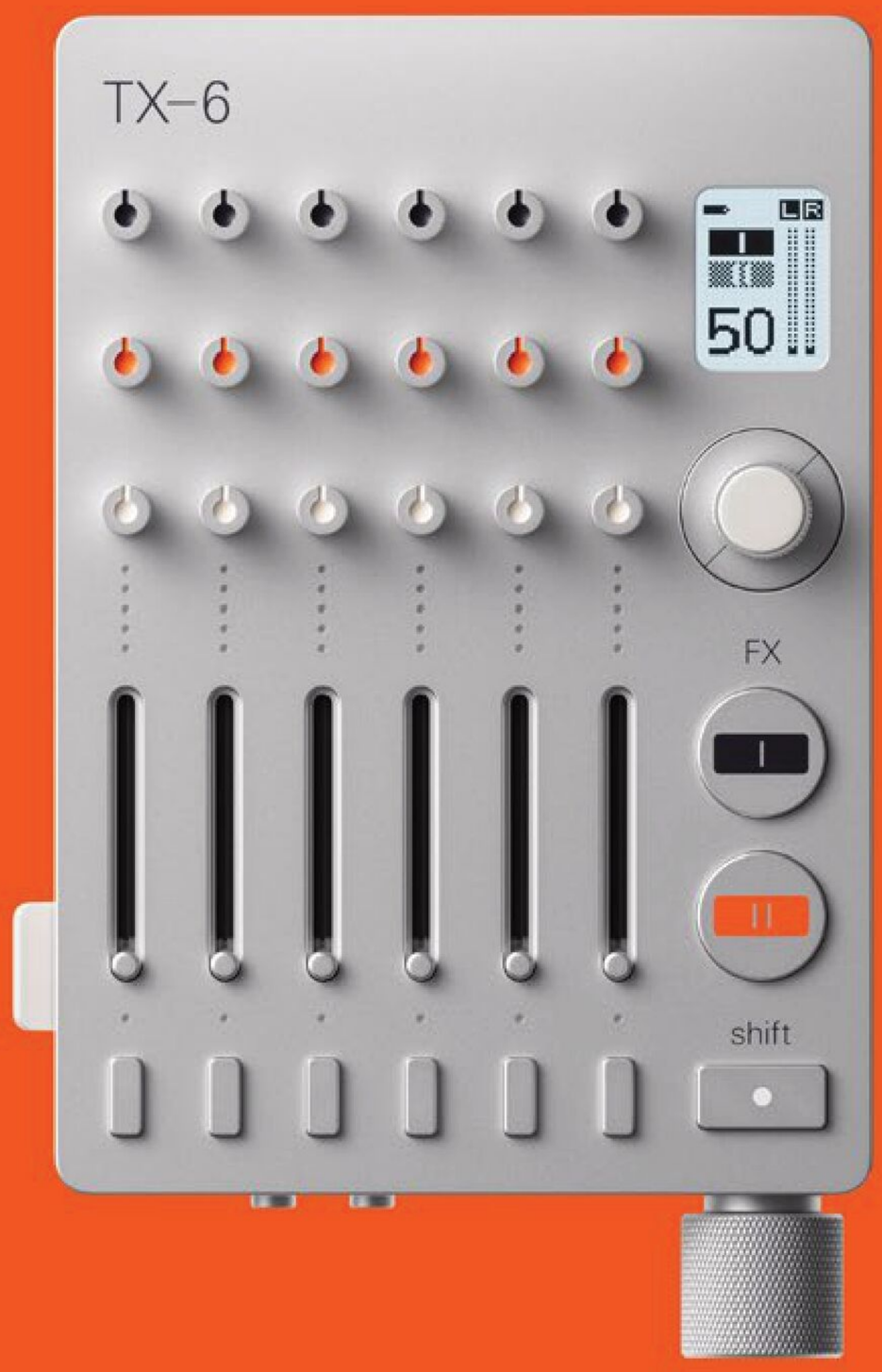
'Arabesque No 1' is available now via Bandcamp. The full EP will be out later this year on Leaving

SMALL WONDER

Powerful six-channel mixer from music tech innovators

Oh how we love thee, Teenage Engineering, Swedish wizards of immaculately conceived gadgets and gizmos. Never ones to hold back, their latest offering, the TX-6, looks and sounds the part. An "ultra-portable" six-channel stereo mixer and audio interface, it's more than comparable with larger units, and is loaded with tech. Battery-powered (it'll give you eight hours of life before needing a charge), it also functions as a synth with four oscillator waveforms and four synthesised drum sounds. And it doesn't stop there… With eight built-in effects and a DJ mode, it can also be used as a wireless midi controller. With a £1,199 price tag, you'll have to smash the piggy bank, but this tactile, all-in-one kit will more than reward your investment.

teenage.engineering



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SATURDAY 23

MOGWAI · METRONOMY · TIM PEAKE
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SUNDAY 24

BJÖRK WITH THE **HALLÉ ORCHESTRA**
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EAR AND NOW

Next-gen earphones, ready for summer

Dinky they may well be, but in terms of performance, Bang & Olufsen's new Beoplay EX earbuds punch above their weight. Adopted for added comfort, the stem-based shape is a first for B&O, and the buds come with a host of features, including adaptive noise cancellation, the latest Bluetooth tech, wireless charging and an impressive 9.2mm driver, promising real bass oomph and mighty sound. Resistant to water, dust and even sweat, the EX are built to last. Available in Anthracite Oxygen, Gold Tone or Black Anthracite, and priced at £349, they're an absolute steal. **bang-olufsen.com**

BACK TO NATURE

Generative music from psychoactive plants

Canadian electronic artist Tarun Nayar, aka Modern Biology, went foraging for his new single, 'Mushroom Dance'. Attaching electrodes to mushrooms (a red-belted conk, in this case), Nayar recorded the fungi's bio-electrical impulses using a Eurorack modular patch, built around Scottish developer Instruo's biofeedback-sensing SCÍON module. The result is a delicate rain of atmospheric sounds and melodies.

"Making music with plant and fungal bioelectricity was an idea that evolved over the course of a few years," says Nayar. "The deeper I got, the more I began to see electricity and vibration as the kind of fundamental language of the universe!" All proceeds from 'Mushroom Dance' are going to environmental charities, so you know what to do.

Meanwhile, Texas-based artist Joe Patitucci has created an album with a similar methodology, only this time using cannabis leaves. '420hz: Plant Music From Cannabis Plants' was recorded with the PlantWave, a device co-invented by Patitucci which turns bioelectrical signals into MIDI data for his Roland SH-01A synthesiser.

"This is my favourite piece of music I've ever produced," says Patitucci, "largely because of how surprising it is to experience some of the melodic content coming from the plant." **modernbiology.bandcamp.com/plantwave.com**

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Composer, producer, remixer and DJ **Mark Reeder** reveals his formative influences, including Brian Eno, Tony Wilson and a Moog gifted by Klaus Schulze

INTERVIEW: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

ELECTRIC LADYLAND

"When I had just turned 11, I did a load of odd jobs, saved my birthday and Christmas money and told my parents, 'I'm going to the model aeroplane shop'. But I got on a bus to Manchester, bought Jimi Hendrix's 'Electric Ladyland' and smuggled it home! Coming back on the bus I'm thinking, 'If my mum sees this album, she'll put it in the bin! What's an 11-year-old kid doing with a record with naked women on the front cover?'.

"She definitely wasn't a Hendrix fan, either – she'd seen him playing guitar with his teeth on Lulu's show. I was very attracted by that kind of thing, and I liked the reaction that my mother and father had to this kind of music. It spoke to me somehow."

EARLY ROXY

"My first-ever gig was Roxy Music in 1972, at the Hard Rock in Manchester. I was completely petrified. I arrived late afternoon in my school uniform and blagged my way in by helping the roadies, who put me on the guest list.

"When I got into the club and people started coming in, it was all these towering guys dressed in glitter and stuff. It was quite intimidating, as I'd never seen men dress like this before, with make-up on. I lived in the arse-end of Manchester, and there weren't any people like that. Or if there were, you maybe just hid in your own home and got dressed up, but back then you certainly didn't go out on the street like that.

"It was an eye-opening experience to see Brian Eno onstage wearing feathers… I had no idea what Roxy Music looked like, as I'd only heard their records. That first gig changed my entire view on things."

VIRGIN TERRITORY

"I've always shared the music I listen to, and I take great pleasure in giving someone a nice surprise. I hope the music I play will take you on a journey, help you think outside the box, or maybe take your life in a different direction.

PHOTO: LIA OTTSU

"Last year, an interviewer pointed out that Tony Wilson was influenced by the music I played him. I had a part-time job in Manchester's Virgin Records shop, and Tony, Rob Gretton, Peter Saville and Malcolm Garrett all came into the shop regularly – literally every dinner time. Tony would spend an hour listening to music and asking what I thought. I remember trying to get them to listen to Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' when it came out in 1977. I was like, 'Fucking hell! This is *amazing*!'. But it was derided as disco, and the only person I managed to convince that it was good was Howard Devoto from Magazine."

UNKNOWN PLEASURES

"When I heard 'Unknown Pleasures' for the first time, I was elated. Ian Curtis had given me a cassette of what was going to be Joy Division's first album, which would end up as the 'Warsaw' bootleg years later, so I already knew some of the songs. But they were just demos in comparison to the actual album. Hearing it was like a religious experience, like, 'Ah, so this is what you can do. From those ideas, you can make it into… this'.

"It was a total revelation as to what production actually meant for me because I had never even been in a studio before, and I didn't know what the job of a producer was. To hear that record as a demo from the band, and then hear it as a finished album just opened everything up. I realised you can play something in your bedroom, make a few tracks, give it to a producer, and they might turn it into something completely magical."

SYNTH EPIPHANY

"The first time I heard a record playing synthesisers, my mind was blown. My cousin wanted to buy a stereo and we went to some guy's house and he played us 'Switched-On Bach' by Wendy Carlos. After that, I wanted to hear any record with that kind of simplifier sound on it because I just couldn't get my head around it. It sounded so futuristic!

"My first synth was a Micromoog, given to me by Klaus Schulze. When I was in the band Die Unbekannten, we went out for a drink with this girl called Elisabeth Recker who ran Monogam Records. We'd just released our first single on Monogam, and I wanted to use more synthesisers, but I didn't have one at that point. She was like, 'Oh, I'm going out for dinner with Klaus Schulze next week', and she managed to blag one out of him! So, Klaus gave us a synth."

MADE IN GERMANY

"Coming to Berlin in 1978 was another revelation. It was completely derelict – bullet-riddled from the war, every other brick was black, everything was cheap, and it was open 24 hours a day. You could go out drinking at midnight, then carry on drinking until midnight the following day. It's still like that.

"In Berlin, I feel that I'm living in the last bastion of free thinking. There's a certain amount of trust. On the underground, for example, you could just go down the stairs and get on the train. You don't even have to buy a ticket. It's up to you, whether you do or don't buy the ticket. It's not regimented here like it is in a lot of places, and it's not as expensive. You don't feel that the state is trying to make as much money out of you as possible, like it is in the UK, where they'll be taxing the air you breathe next!

"My new album with Alanas Chosnau, 'Life Everywhere', is about living in totalitarian systems and how that affects us. All the songs are like love songs, but with a hidden meaning. Imagine a love story between Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Because of the war, we thought it would be better to bring forward the release so that people could listen to the songs and see the relationship with what's going on now. The cover represents the global cage of humanity being trapped."

'Life Everywhere', Mark Reeder's collaboration with Alanas Chosnau, is out now on MFS

MOA MOA

Wild-style technicolour future-pop

WHO THEY?

A hugely promising South London five-piece led by vocalist, songwriter and producer James Ratcliffe alongside longtime friends Dan Byrne, Connor James, Sophie Parkes and Matt Taylor. Moa Moa have a joint mission to "create unpredictable, ambitious and hook-laden songs that take all the best bits from their diverse musical backgrounds". Straightforward enough.

WHY MOA MOA?

The alchemical concoction they brew sounds like nothing else around – fierce, spirited and joyfully experimental, yet also unfathomably and disarmingly accessible. They really do sound like the best-case scenario for the future of alt-pop, such is their dazzling, inventive and maverick approach. This truly intoxicating mix absolutely rivets from the opening notes of new EP 'Brain Feelings', which you must listen to at your earliest possible convenience. Oh, and also because the singer really knows how to work autotune, using it in choice moments as an experimental instrument more akin to the vocoder, to distort and bamboozle in ways that are long overdue. If there's any justice in the world, they will be garlanded with awards, prizes and ecstatic praise from all angles soon enough.

TELL US MORE...

You'll hear influences as diverse as Battles, Terry Riley, Bollywood and foot-stomping glam rock on 'Brain Feelings'. Yet there's an astonishing level of originality and vibrant intensity at play on tracks like 'Information' that will alert your attuned ears to something quite different. Psychedelic synthpop hasn't had an allure as strong as this since MGMT or Tame Impala first crashed onto the scene. But Moa Moa's pretension-free, searching musicality and lyrical singularity suggest a rare potential for longevity. Quick, get involved…

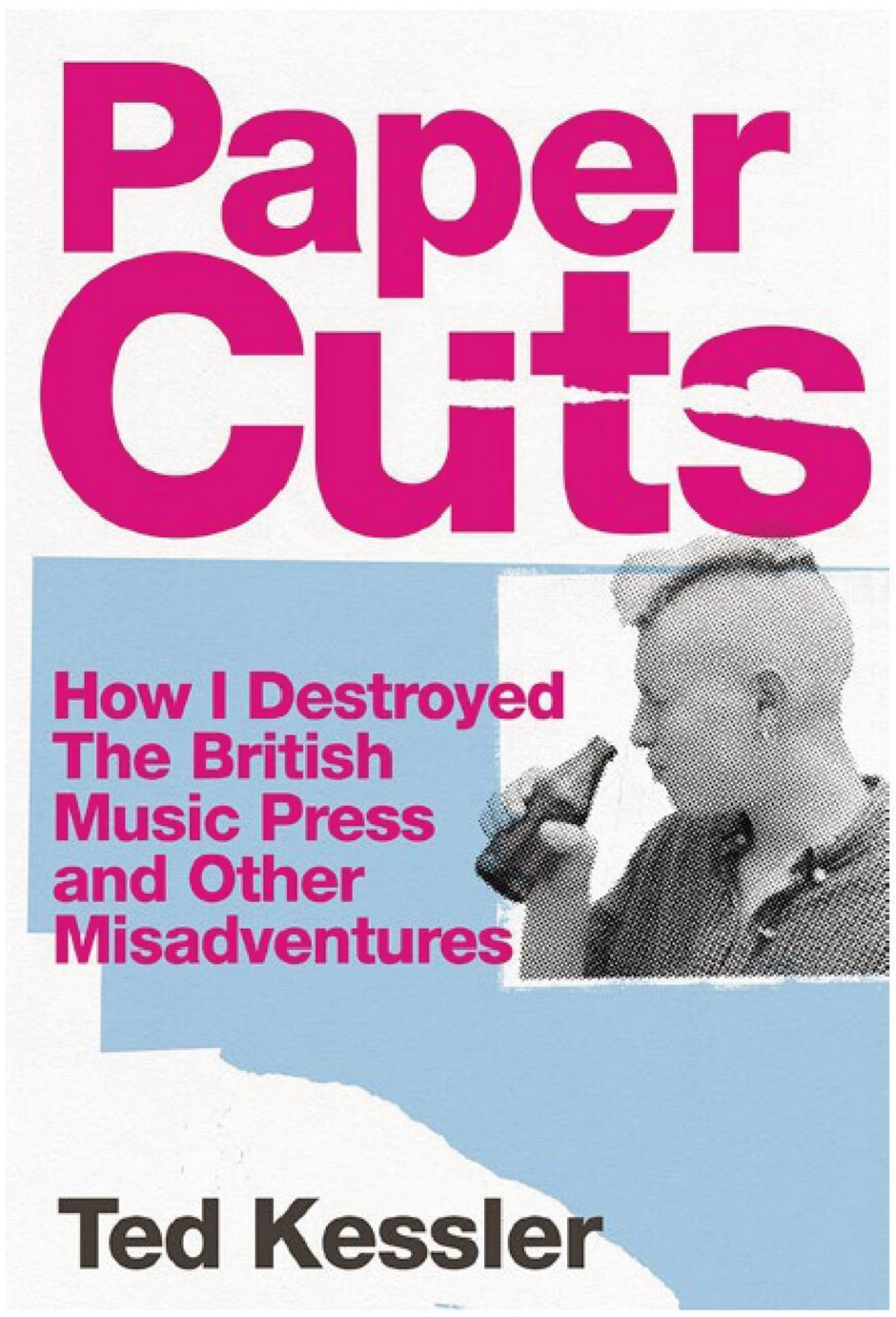
CARL GRIFFIN

'Brain Feelings' is out now on Incredibly Bland

EVERYTHING IN ITS WRITE PLACE

Music journo tells all in entertaining memoir

Ted Kessler is a former NME scribe who worked at Q magazine for 16 years, before it folded with him as editor in 2020. 'Paper Cuts' is Kessler's coming-of-age memoir, revealing how writing about music provided salvation for the author, a self-confessed "delinquent doofus" who left school aged 17, determined "to be someone who listened to music professionally". Well, he didn't half achieve that. As well as being packed with Kessler's rip-roaring anecdotes of rock star encounters through the booming 90s and 2000s (he went to Cuba with the Happy Mondays, while Liam Gallagher and Paul Weller both provide quotes for the book jacket), it also tells the colourful story of the final throes of a certain era of music print journalism. **whiterabbitbooks.co.uk**



THERE GOES A TENOR

Biography of legendary Finnish producer

Multi-instrumentalist, polymath and shapeshifting music auteur Jimi Tenor – Finland's Damon Albarn – is widely considered to be his home country's first proper pop star. Born Lassi Lehto in 1965 (he renamed himself after Jimmy Osmond and the tenor saxophone), Tenor is now the first subject of a new 'Sounds, Sights & Stories' series of books, published by Ventil Verlag and Tapete Records. Titled 'Omniverse', the book uses photos and essays to tell the story of his rich and varied career, which has also included a stint as a tourist photographer for the Empire State Building, a film-maker and even a fashion designer. A techno pioneer in the 1990s (he was signed to Warp for a while), Tenor turned to jazz in the 2000s, recording an album with Afrobeat legend Tony Allen. Order a copy now for £31.99. **ventil-verlag.de**

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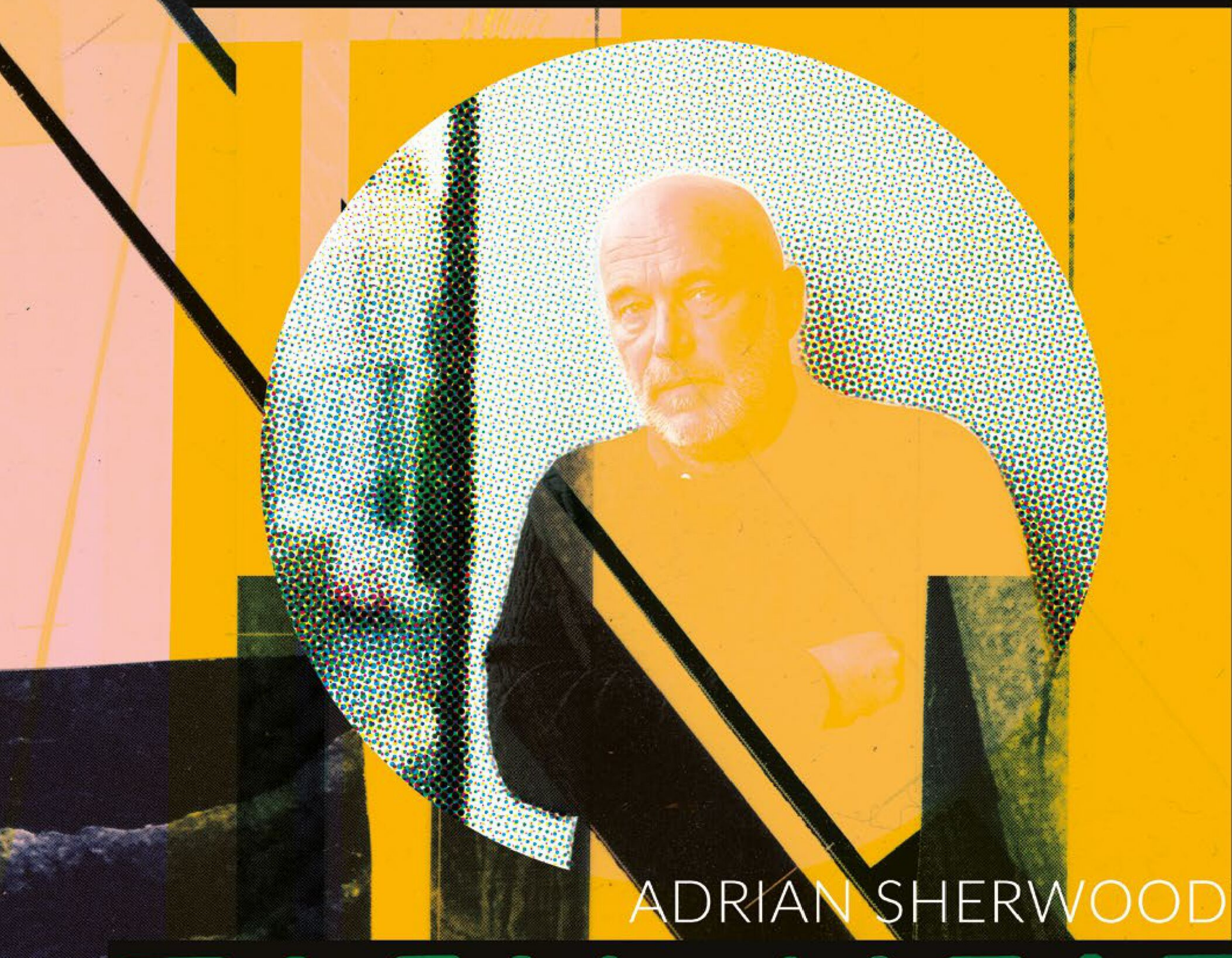

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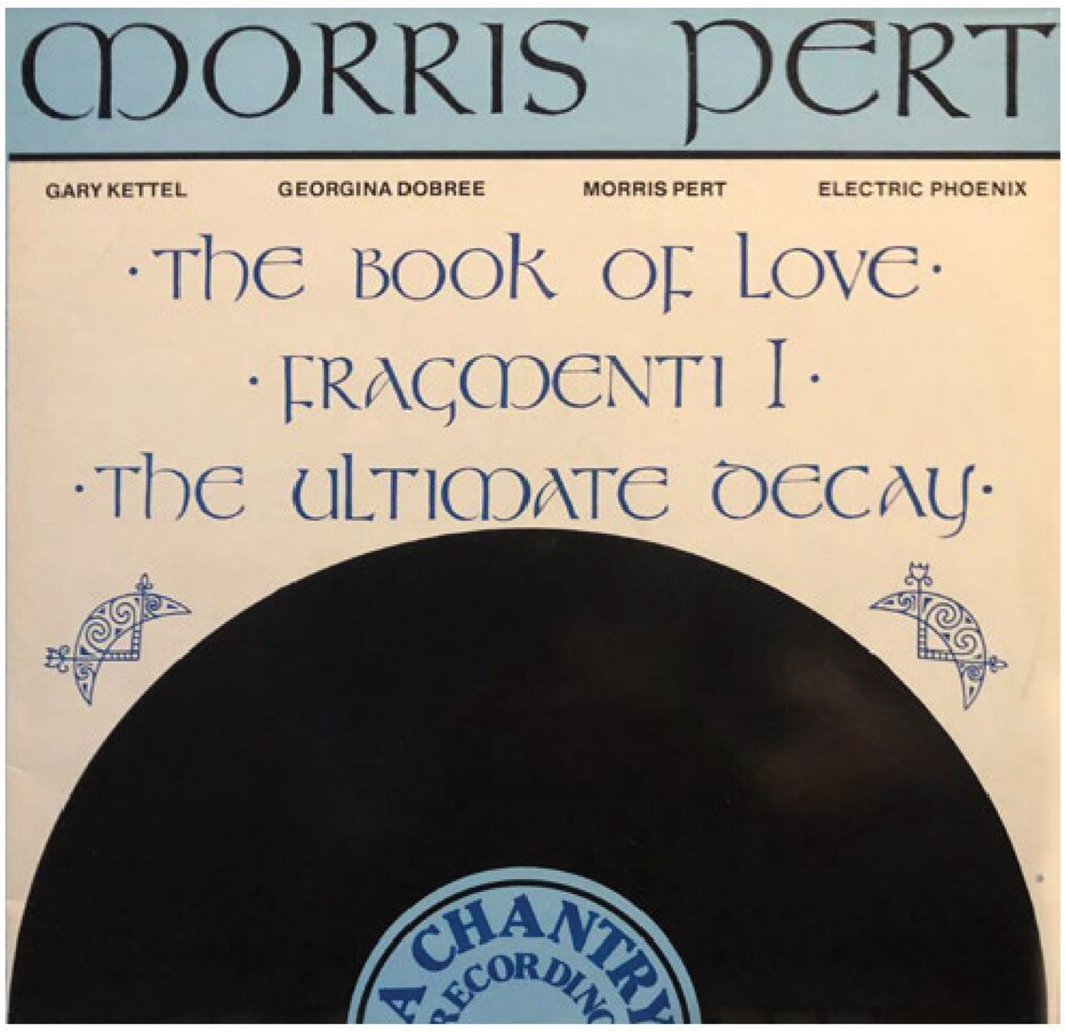
SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** uncovers an album by British composer and session percussionist **Morris Pert**



Morris Pert was a Scottish composer, percussionist and pianist whose work straddled the worlds of classical, jazz rock and electronic music. He was a sought-after collaborator who played with the Japanese percussionist Stomu Yamash'ta in the early 1970s and became more heavily involved in the jazz-rock scene as the decade progressed, joining Brand X for their second album in the late 1970s. His career as a high-profile session percussionist took off at around the same time, and he appeared on albums by Peter Gabriel, Kate Bush, Wings (and later Paul McCartney), Mike Oldfield, Bryan Ferry and Talk Talk, to list just a few of his credits.

Pert's album, 'The Book Of Love / Fragmenti I / The Ultimate Decay', was released on a label called Chantry in 1982. The lead track 'The Book Of Love', which is subtitled 'Sixteen Illuminations On A Medieval Manuscript', was commissioned by the BBC for the percussionist Gary Kettel and had been broadcast on Radio 3 in 1981.

The track I really like is 'The Ultimate Decay', which takes up all of side two. It's got dense organ clusters, bells, ring-modulated voices, electronic noises and tones – everything you could hope for. It's tape music with an avant-garde vocal group called Electric Phoenix, who commissioned the piece for the 1978 St Bartholomew's Festival of 20th century music.

They're really interesting too. The group split from Swingle II to popularise their repertoire of amplified voices and electronics and to perform Luciano Berio's vocal compositions. I'd never heard of them, but I discovered them through Morris Pert.

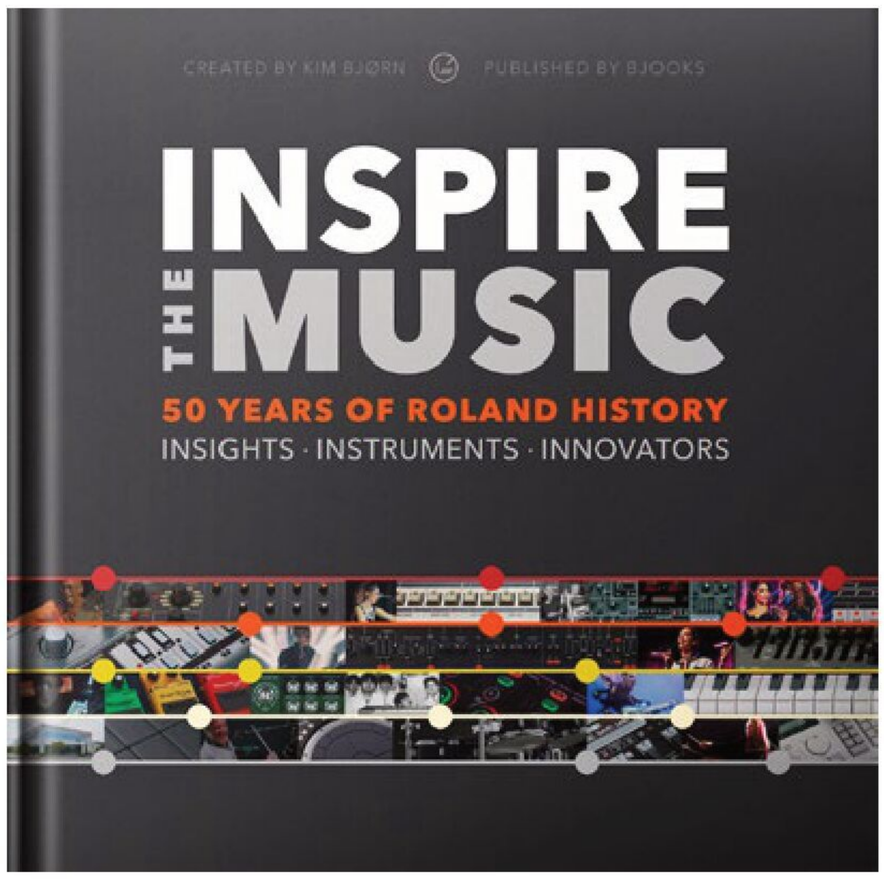
Pert released one other album under his own name before this one, 'Luminos / Chromosphere / 4 Japanese Verses', in 1975. It includes another entire B-side-hogging composition from Sun Treader – the name of one of his projects. His piece, 'Eoastrion Op 30 For Eb Clarinet And Tape', features on a compilation called 'Contemporary Clarinet Volume 2', another Chantry release from 1978. But the best album is 'The Book Of Love', which is just him. He would create pieces using tape and when he performed live, would play along with the tapes.

Pert spent the last part of his life living in Balchrick, which lies about as far to the north-west of Scotland as you can get. He built a studio there and continued composing, his work inspired in part by the symbolism of the Picts who inhabited the country over a thousand years ago and whose rock carvings survive to this day. He died at home in 2010, aged 62.

READY TO ROLAND

History of iconic Japanese company retold

Without Roland instruments, the musical landscape would look completely different. The fabled Roland TR-808 drum machine is as important to hip hop as the Fender Stratocaster is to rock 'n' roll, while Juan Atkins' use of the RS-09 analogue string synth defined the early techno sound, and the TB-303 was the beating heart of acid house. Danish publishers Bjooks are now celebrating 50 years of the visionary company, which was founded in Osaka in 1972, with a 400-page hardcover book for which they were given access to Roland's vast archive of photographs. There are also interviews with some of the quiet geniuses who helped design the gear, and more than 70 music makers, including Orbital, Richie Hawtin and Jean-Michel Jarre, share their insights. Order a copy now for $71. **bjooks.com**



KRAFTBOOK

Seminal Kraftwerk album gets a deep dive

'Computer World' is one of pop and electronic music's most prophetic albums. Released in 1981, Kraftwerk's eighth studio album anticipated our obsession with computers, decades ahead of the actual reality, while also providing the blueprint for Detroit techno and the myriad of genres that spiralled out from there. It's the reason why Steve Tupai Francis, an Australia-based writer, academic and self-confessed "geek obsessive", has chosen the album as the subject for Bloomsbury's ever-expanding 33 ⅓ series.

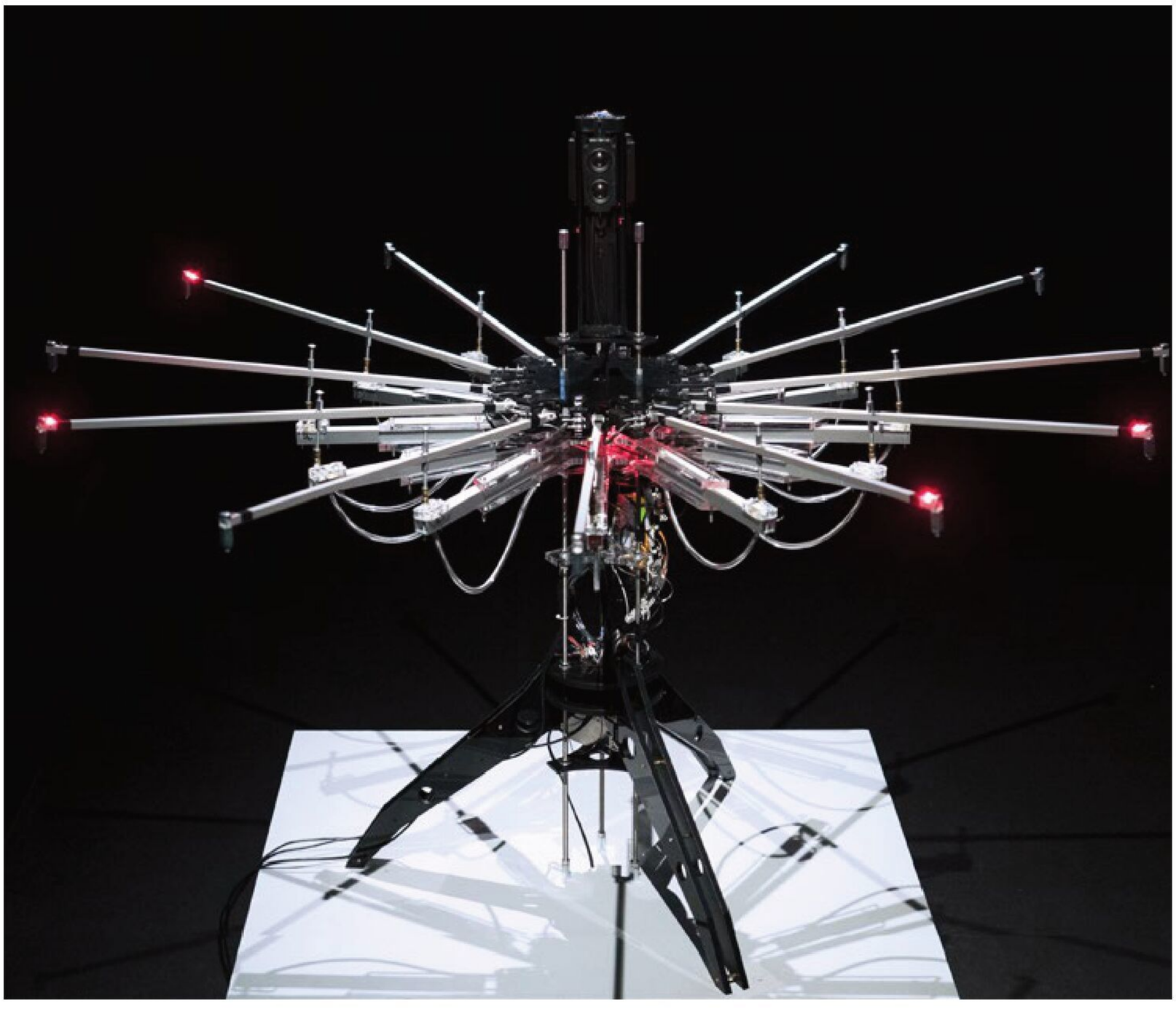
In the book, Francis digs deep into the band's revolutionary sonic template, conceptual and artistic preoccupations, and lyrical obsessions "to provide new insights into one of the greatest records ever made". It might seem hyperbolic to apply that tag to an album that includes the jaunty, childlike lyricism of 'Pocket Calculator' ("By pressing down a special key / It plays a little melody"), but Francis is here to convince you that it is Kraftwerk's "crowning achievement". He also argues that movement and transition are central to their philosophy, and uses theories of post-humanism, cybernetics and the anthropology of transnationalism to illustrate this. Out next month, preorder it now for £8.99. **bloomsbury.com**

FLASH FORWARD

Artist channels lightning in new sound sculpture

If you're the sort to thrive in the meeting point between sound and meteorology, you will undoubtedly love the Adad, the latest sound sculpture by transdisciplinary Russian artist and researcher Dmitry Morozov – known professionally as ::vtol:: – whose interests lie in sound, robotics and installation.

Looking like a weapon from the future, the Adad (a Mesopotamian god of weather, hurricanes, storms, thunder and rain) is actually a novel installation designed to demonstrate the activity of lightning strikes on Earth. It consists of 12 transparent piezocrystals (which Morozov grew especially for the installation) and 12 motorised hammers that hit the crystals each time lightning strikes, the data coming live from a meteorological site. When this happens, a small electrical discharge is produced, creating a flash of light and eerie sound effects. **vtol.cc**



COVENTRY, RAVE ON

Rave on with **‘In Pursuit Of Repetitive Beats’**, the interactive installation taking your brain back to 1989

WORDS: BEN GILBERT

Coventry’s resurgence to current UK City of Culture speaks of industrial-scale innovation and trailblazing societal momentum. “This is the city where movement began,” reads the accompanying PR statement. “We have transformed raw steel into racing machines. We move every heart. Turning flames into hope and ruin into beauty. The power to move is always in our blood,” it concludes, framing an achievement that probably feels rather more tangible than any politicised concept of levelling up.

‘In Pursuit Of Repetitive Beats’ sits within a broad calendar of events and uses virtual reality to deliver a dynamic recreation of the late 1980s, when local promoters Amnesia House were figureheads in the Midlands acid house scene. Devised by London-based East City Films and launched in April at The Box in Coventry’s “artistically re-purposed” FarGo Village, the interactive installation is a multi-sensory experience that, like the city, seeks to capture the sense of purpose that can be realised at both an individual and collective level when cultural mobilisation subverts the course of British history.

“This is the end of Thatcherism,” says director and East City co-founder Darren Emerson of the pivotal moment both nationally and regionally. “It’s the end of a decade where industry changes across the UK, including Coventry.”

Once considered the UK’s “motor city”, jobs were shredded in this sector during the 80s.

“There was a lot of unemployment and a sense of hopelessness,” explains Emerson. “Acid house gave people hope. It’s a cultural and youth revolution, probably the last one we had, and was about finding that sense of belonging.

“It ended up sucking in all different types of races, communities and classes living in and around Coventry. And it was the same up and down the country. There were posh boys, football firms, Jamaican sound systems, entrepreneurs and people who wanted to start DJing and MCing. They all came together to create something unique – that feeling of communion and cohesion is what this experience is about. But it’s also what was special about that scene.”

As an installation, ‘In Pursuit Of Repetitive Beats’ is meticulously planned and executed. Initially, there is a mundane sense of ritual founded on familiar archetypes – dusky warehouse setting, flyers and wristbands – from the real world. But loading up the technology, which includes an Oculus Quest 2 virtual reality headset and a SUBPAC haptic vest, foreshadows your entrance into an environment that slingshots participants into the future to revisit the past. Taking place in 1989, you become part of a group of friends hunting an illegal rave.

“It’s set in Coventry, but this is a universal story,” adds Emerson.

Despite any initial disorientation prompted by the bulky equipment, there are further moments of normality. You gaze out of a nondescript bedroom window at a suburban sunset and tune into pirate radio stations and BBC News. You examine evidence collected by the local police constabulary’s Acid House Squad, and take a call at a service station next to a physically rumbling M6 motorway.

Some moments feel highly profound. The experience, lasting around 30 minutes, starts off with Orbital’s ‘Chime’ and a titanic record needle rearing into view like the video for Flowered Up’s ‘Weekender’. This sense of immersion is repeatedly reinforced by the unparalleled power of VR in opening up a portal to a world encompassing cinema, modern art and, of course, music.

It’s there in the transcendent feeling of levitation hovering above a convoy of Ford Escorts and Peugeot 205s trundling across a ‘Tron’-style landscape as police cars and helicopters close in. It’s also there in the hyper-real sensory moments and the starbursts of light, akin to Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama’s psychedelic visualisations, or as Joey Beltram’s ‘Energy Flash’ cuts through an intensely claustrophobic rave scene. Collectively, the sense of agency feels roughly akin to ‘Grand Theft Auto 6: Kingdom Of Mercia’.

“We’re trying to create a sonic and visual stimulus within a narrative, to produce that sense of trepidation or euphoria you might have had at that time,” suggests Emerson, who has curated a soundtrack featuring evocative contributions from Nexus 21 and Rhythmatic. “VR is all about feeling and emotion. Suddenly you connect with a deeper part of yourself.”

Emerson has also included contemporary material from Max Cooper and Joe Goddard, having decided against slavishly redeploying music from the era in order to create something both “cosmic” and “cinematic”.

Alongside Amnesia House, there are contributions from DJs, security figures and other promoters who were there, including Lifestyle 2000 rave organiser Cornell Chambers. In a memory triggered within the installation, he seeks to capture the essence of acid house.

“It’s taking out the poison, taking out the angst, taking out the aggression… you realise you don’t need to be violent and that maybe the world could be a better place.”

An outdated vision, perhaps, but one that endures within the fantastical digital futurism of these walls.

‘In Pursuit Of Repetitive Beats’ is expected to tour from October. For more details, go to eastcityfilms.com/iporb

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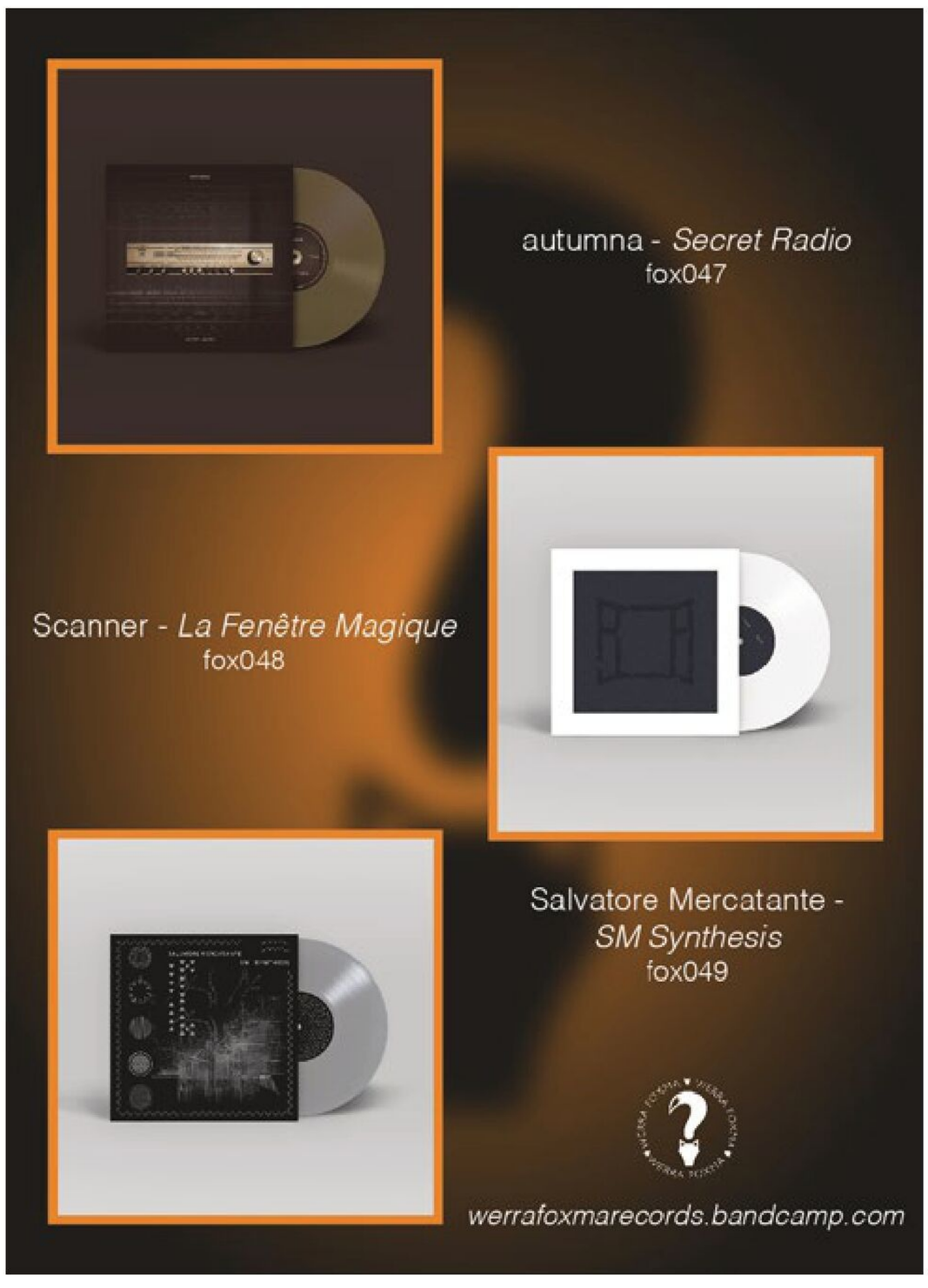


PULSE

DUMMY

Boom bap-inspired cosmic indie

WHO THEY?

Transplants from the Baltimore indie rock scene, Dummy are a four-piece now based in LA, who position their sound somewhere betwixt 90s-era Stereolab and something that might easily have been embedded on your 'Notorious Byrd Brothers' album. Whether or not that's a recipe for simple cult success or indie world domination is yet to be seen, but the band has so far managed to distinguish itself from the perpetually congested West Coast field.

WHY DUMMY?

'Final Weapon', from their debut long-player, 'Mandatory Enjoyment', is a track that gives a fleeting nod to the krautrock heroes of old, while the band whizz down some sonic Californian highway en route to the beach. Bearing lyrics inspired by a documentary the band saw on "nuclear veterans", any sense of doom or foreboding is put down by the breezy harmonies and shimmering keyboard lines. Elsewhere, the guitars are bare and jangly, and often held up by dreamy organ washes, as can be heard on 'Daffodils'.

TELL US MORE...

The sense that Dummy have a secret stash of hip hop faves handy was confirmed during a recent email exchange with guitarist Joe Trainor. "It's not something we are asked or talk about much, cos the influence isn't so obvious. One major influence is Digable Planets – the production on 'Blowout Comb' is mind-blowing." With two EPs and an album, there's already plenty to explore from a band who have arguably prospered because they're outsiders. "It's hard to say what the local scene thinks of us," muses Trainor. "We have friends, but mostly we don't feel like there is a strong scene outside our group. LA is a confusing place." I second that emotion. Seek remedial treatment in Dummy.

JOE SILVA

'Mandatory Enjoyment' is out now on Trouble In Mind

DELAY REACTION

And pedal of the month goes to...

The Habit is the latest innovation from Minneapolis pedal makers, Chase Bliss. Described as an "Echo Collector", it combines the principle of a flexible delay pedal with an onboard memory, meaning it can continuously record audio in the background. Two banks of effects modifiers means that sounds recorded minutes ago can be tweaked and manipulated into something entirely new – create delays, loops, transitions, dissolving echoes and much more besides.

"Habit was inspired by the idea of being able to freely explore and reimagine your own musical history," explain Chase Bliss. "There's something powerful about reusing your own musical decisions. It's still you, but things take on a different meaning once you listen back." Order one now for $399. **chasebliss.com**

OBLIQUE STRATEGY

Look out, Eno doc ahoy

Imagine being given exclusive access to Brian Eno's personal archives, home to over 400 hours of material spanning 50 years of work, much of it unreleased. Well, that's exactly what happened with American filmmaker Gary Hustwit. After the pair met during the making of Hustwit's film about German designer Dieter Rams, for which Eno wrote the original score, the potential for a documentary about the producer's life and work was floated, and finally announced last month.

Due for release in 2023, there will be various versions of the film, and Hustwit plans to incorporate "groundbreaking generative technology in its creation and exhibition", in a nod to Eno's boundary-pushing approach.

"You can't make a conventional, by-the-numbers bio doc about Brian Eno," writes Hustwit on his website. "That would be antithetical and a missed opportunity. What I'm trying to do is create a cinematic experience that's as innovative as Brian's approach to music and art." **hustwit.com**

TIME MACHINE

Jon Wozencroft, founder of pioneering label and publisher **Touch**, reflects on 40 years of experimental electronics and audiovisual adventures

WORDS: MAT SMITH

"Touch can be anything it desires, from words to music to images," asserted a text in the plastic wallet that encased 'Meridians', issued by Touch in 1983. "No two items are alike. Sameness is anathema."

"It was a collective statement," explains Jon Wozencroft, "not a manifesto, as such. It was more like a provocation to ourselves."

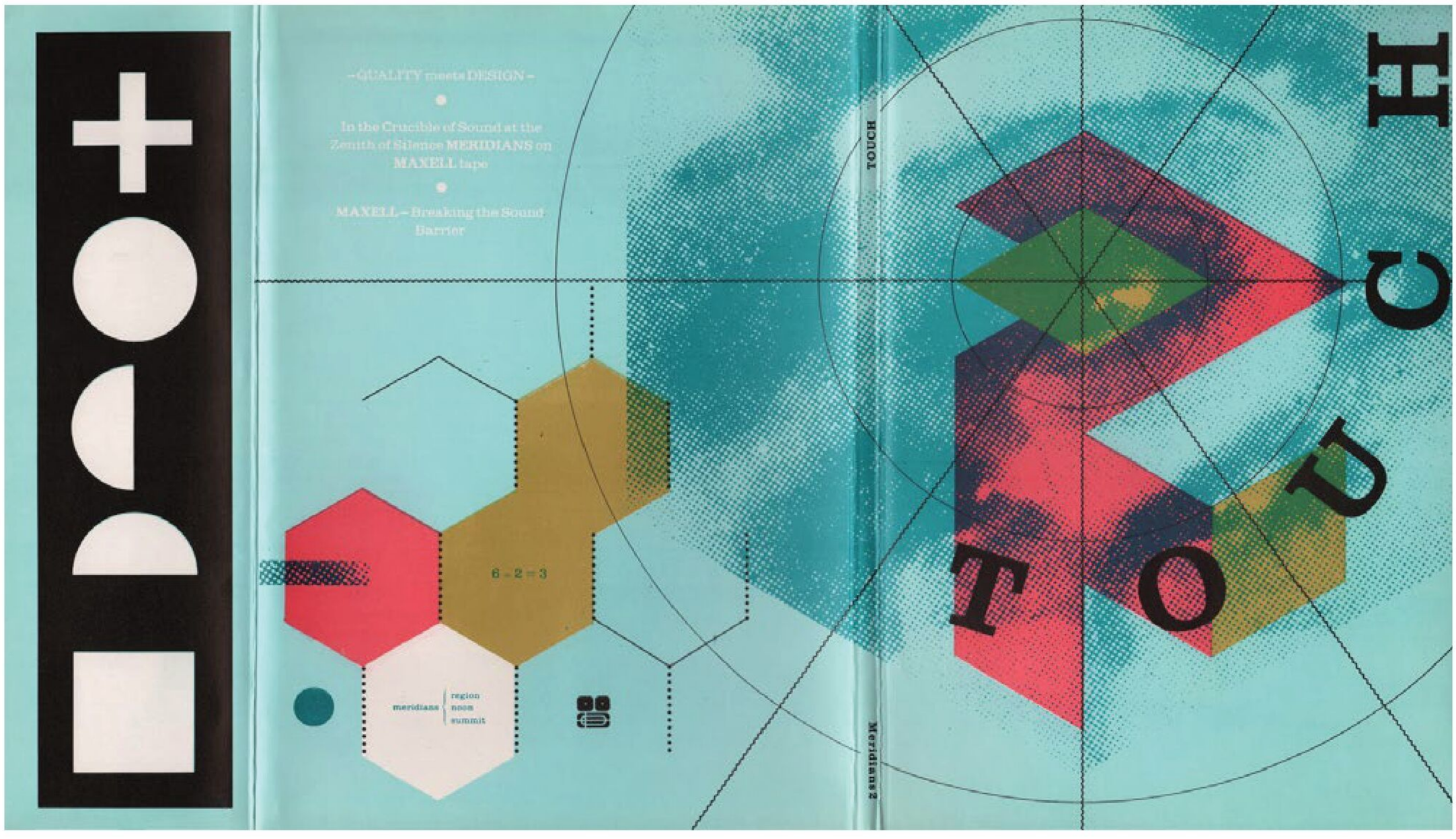
The text was assembled by the four founders of Touch – Wozencroft, Mike Harding, Andrew McKenzie and Garry Mouat – and that collective statement would guide the activities of the independent music project for the next four decades. A glance at the array of events organised to mark this, their 40th anniversary year, shows how true they've stayed to their defining philosophy.

Wozencroft began forming the idea for Touch in 1981 as he finished his studies at Durham University. It was on his frequent visits to Newcastle that he got to know McKenzie, who was then working at the city's Virgin Megastore, and the pair bonded over a shared passion for The Residents, Joy Division and Throbbing Gristle. After graduating, Wozencroft did a one-year postgraduate course at the London College Of Printing and spent most evenings at gigs.

"One night at the beginning of 1982, I went to the Moonlight Club in West Hampstead to see Academy One," he remembers. "That's where I met Mike Harding, as he was managing them. We got talking and he introduced me to Garry Mouat, who was doing design work for the publishing company Mike was involved with."

Though the four had bonded over music, the idea for Touch was always intended to be much broader.

"We knew we couldn't – and didn't want to be – a record label," insists Wozencroft. "What is beyond a label? Where is the space between art, design, music, photography, film, writing and all of these things? I was a huge fan of Kandinsky, Klee and Bauhaus art. Kandinsky was all about synaesthesia, colour and music, and that fed into the idea for Touch. He had also published an almanac, 'Der Blaue Reiter', and a set of woodcuts



he called 'Sounds'. At that time, there was a lot of attention towards what was then called 'mixed media', but we didn't just want to be part of the art world – we wanted to be in the shops as well."

Touch rapidly moved from a rough outline of an idea when, in March 1982, Wozencroft approached New Order backstage after a gig at Newcastle's Mayfair venue about providing a track for the first Touch product, 'Feature Mist'. Two months later, at another New Order gig at Pennies in Norwich, Wozencroft and Harding were handed the band's contribution – a cassette entitled 'Haçienda: Video 586'.

"Mike and I put that cassette on as we were steaming away from Norwich," recalls Wozencroft with a sparkle in his eye. "Oh my god! It turned out that this was 22-and-a-half minutes long!"

While 'Video 586' gave 'Feature Mist' the centrepiece around which everything else was constructed, the length of the track caused some angst.

"We dedicated ourselves to a C60 cassette, and there were lots of other things we wanted on it," says Wozencroft. "The New Order track would have taken up almost the whole of one side, so I had to work out a way to cut it into sections. I was really nervous about it. I met Bernard Sumner and Stephen Morris again at a concert in Blackpool in August 1982. I said, 'Look, can I treat this like a piece of film?'. They said, 'Yeah, you can do what you want with it. This is our gift to you'. I was completely blown away by that."

In its final state, 'Feature Mist' appeared in December 1982 as an unbranded Maxell C60 cassette, accompanied by an A5 magazine, all housed inside a plastic wallet. The title wasn't evident and only appears at the very back of the magazine.

Alongside two edits of 'Video 586' were tracks by Tuxedomoon, Simple Minds, Andrew McKenzie's pre-Hafler Trio unit Flesh, Egyptian musician Soliman Gamil, Eric Random, an interview recording Wozencroft did with Robert Wyatt, and excerpts from an event at London's Riverside Studios focused on the work of Vladimir Mayakovsky. The accompanying magazine included text-based art, photography by Touch acolyte Panni Charrington and The Rozz Tox Manifesto, written by Residents collaborator Gary Panter. Highlighting how well attuned it was to the early 1980s zeitgeist, 'Feature Mist' sold 5,000 copies.

"We wanted to do something on cassette because we could control the mode of production," explains Wozencroft. "Recording studios and professional mastering were just too expensive. The cost of printing was bad enough. I managed to do a deal with Maxell so that they would sell us cheap cassettes in return for an ad on the back cover, which we designed, as we wanted it to be in keeping with the rest of the magazine."

Flushed with success, the Touch team plotted an ambitious follow-up in the form of the two-part 'Meridians'. Both instalments were issued as unbranded Maxell cassettes again, with 'Meridians 2' accompanied by a full-colour pack of "inserts" inside a screen-printed plastic wallet.

Sonically, the cassettes were full of firsts – the first tracks from Touch 33 (Wozencroft), The Pathfinders (designers Malcolm Garrett and Roger Cleghorn), Pascal Gabriel, Wire's Graham Lewis, Deux Filles (Simon Fisher Turner and Colin Lloyd-Tucker), Derek Jarman, Test Dept and Current 93 – plus exclusive tracks from artists like John Foxx, A Certain Ratio and Ludus.

Each insert included was a single page featuring art, design and texts from Garrett, Paul Morley, Panni Charrington, Peter Saville, Linder, Russell Mills and others. More than just a lavish release, 'Meridians' seemed to offer an eyewitness account of an unnamed community of like-minded creatives.

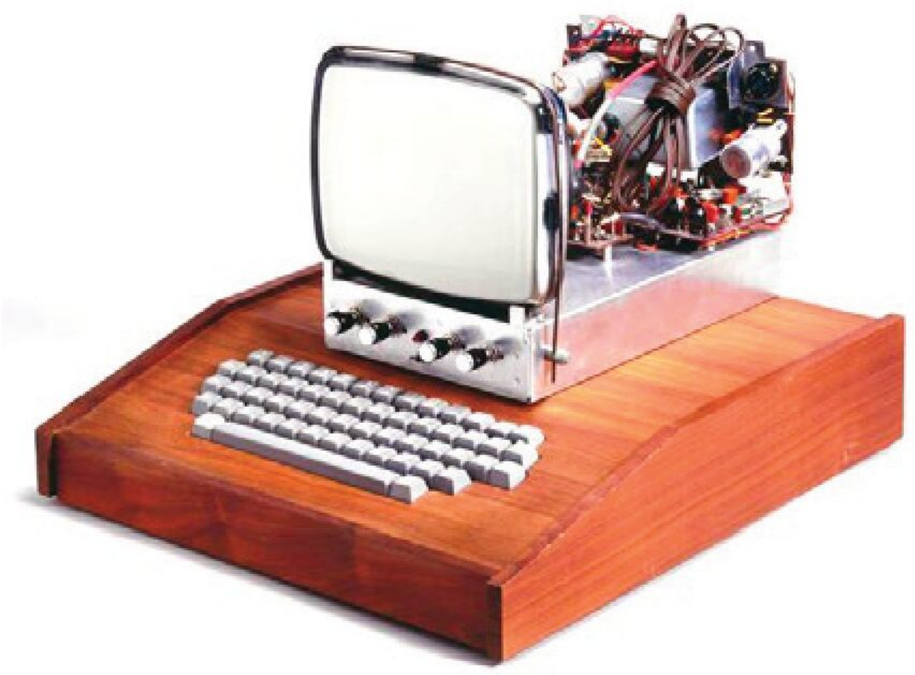
"We wanted to be a kind of transmitter station for all these amazing, weird things that were going on," says Wozencroft, who continues to run Touch with Mike Harding today. "There was something in the air in the 1980s and 1990s. You just felt part of a slipstream of cultural dynamism where people wanted to explore something different. These first three Touch cassettes were like beacons that led us to where we are now."

Simon Fisher Turner, Gavin Bryars and others perform at Iklectik in London on 24-25 June as part of the Touch.40 celebrations

iHISTORY

Polish museum shows everything Apple

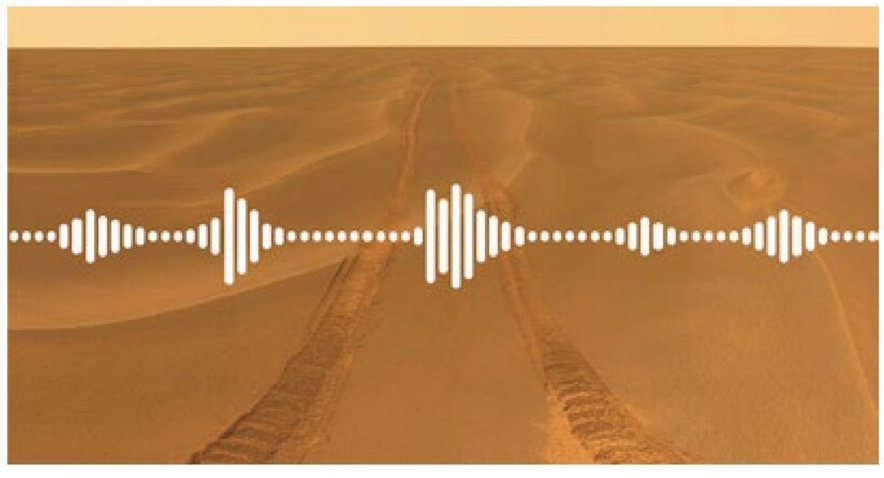
Across a two-hectare area in the Polish capital of Warsaw lies the world's most comprehensive collection of Apple products. The newly opened Apple Museum Poland contains over 1,600 exhibits that include old Apple and Macintosh computers, hardware, prototypes and peripherals, plus all the accompanying promo material. It's also completely interactive so you can "learn and touch history". The items displayed are on rotation to make every visit a unique experience, so if you're planning a trip to Warsaw, make sure you check out the website or social media beforehand to see what's on offer. For more information, go to **applemuzeumpolska.pl**



LIFE ON MARS

Martian ambience analysed by NASA

That we have the technology to send what is effectively a very high-tech remote control car to a planet 34 million miles away boggles the mind. But what's even more mind-blowing is that we can now hear what another planet sounds like. Thanks to a microphone attached to the Perseverance Rover's SuperCam, the sounds found on Mars have been recorded and analysed by a team of scientists, helping them to determine the acoustics of the planet, as well as understanding how sound travels through its carbon dioxide-heavy atmosphere. So what *does* Mars sound like? Well, NASA have found that sound travels a lot more slowly on the Red Planet, which contributes to how silent Mars seems – that's why, at one point during the mission, the Rover's microphone was thought to be broken. You can listen to the recordings and read the study on NASA's website. **nasa.gov**



HANDS OFF

Legendary Moog design makes a glorious return

"I became a designer of electronic musical instruments because of my fascination with the theremin," wrote Bob Moog in the foreword to Albert Glinsky's definitive biography of Leon Theremin. Now the Moog Etherwave, the company's flagship contactless instrument, is back in production and more gorgeous than ever. Based on Moog's 1996 Etherwave design, it hosts a genuine heterodyning oscillator to make that authentic theremin sound, and comes housed in a hand-finished hardwood cabinet, with two quick-release plated-brass antennae for easy portability.

"Today, the legacy of the Moog theremin continues inside the employee-owned company's Asheville, North Carolina factory with the hand-built production of Etherwave Theremin," declares the company. All yours for £849. **moogmusic.com**

LONG TIME COMING

Film tells tale of two unlikely heroes

'23rd Century Giants' is a new feature about Renaldo & The Loaf, the experimental duo from Portsmouth. Brian Poole (aka Renaldo Malpractice) and David Janssen (aka Ted The Loaf) may have only ever used acoustic instruments, yet thanks to innovative production techniques that ranged from splicing tape to twanging rulers, they produced music that sounded as if it was made using blooping modular synths, and mastered on Pluto. As one interviewee puts it, "Hearing Renaldo & The Loaf is like being a baby and hearing things for the very first time, but as an adult".

The 80-minute flick charts Poole and Janssen's humble beginnings, from bonding over a love for T. Rex and using a tape recorder won by Poole's mother in a raffle. You'll also hear about how the pair drifted apart in the late 1980s, before making their comeback in 2016. It's a fantastic watch, and you can order the Blu-ray now for £17.99. **renaldoloaf.com**

SURROUND SOUNDS

Design your own audio backdrop

Say hello to The Ambient Machine, sound artist Yuri Suzuki's latest bonkers invention. Initially featured in an exhibition in Tokyo, where the 20 units sold out almost immediately, this little device lets you "design your own background music" to suit your mood. It does this via 32 switches, with each one playing a different sound, ranging from chirpy birdsong to crackly white noise and coastal fog horns.

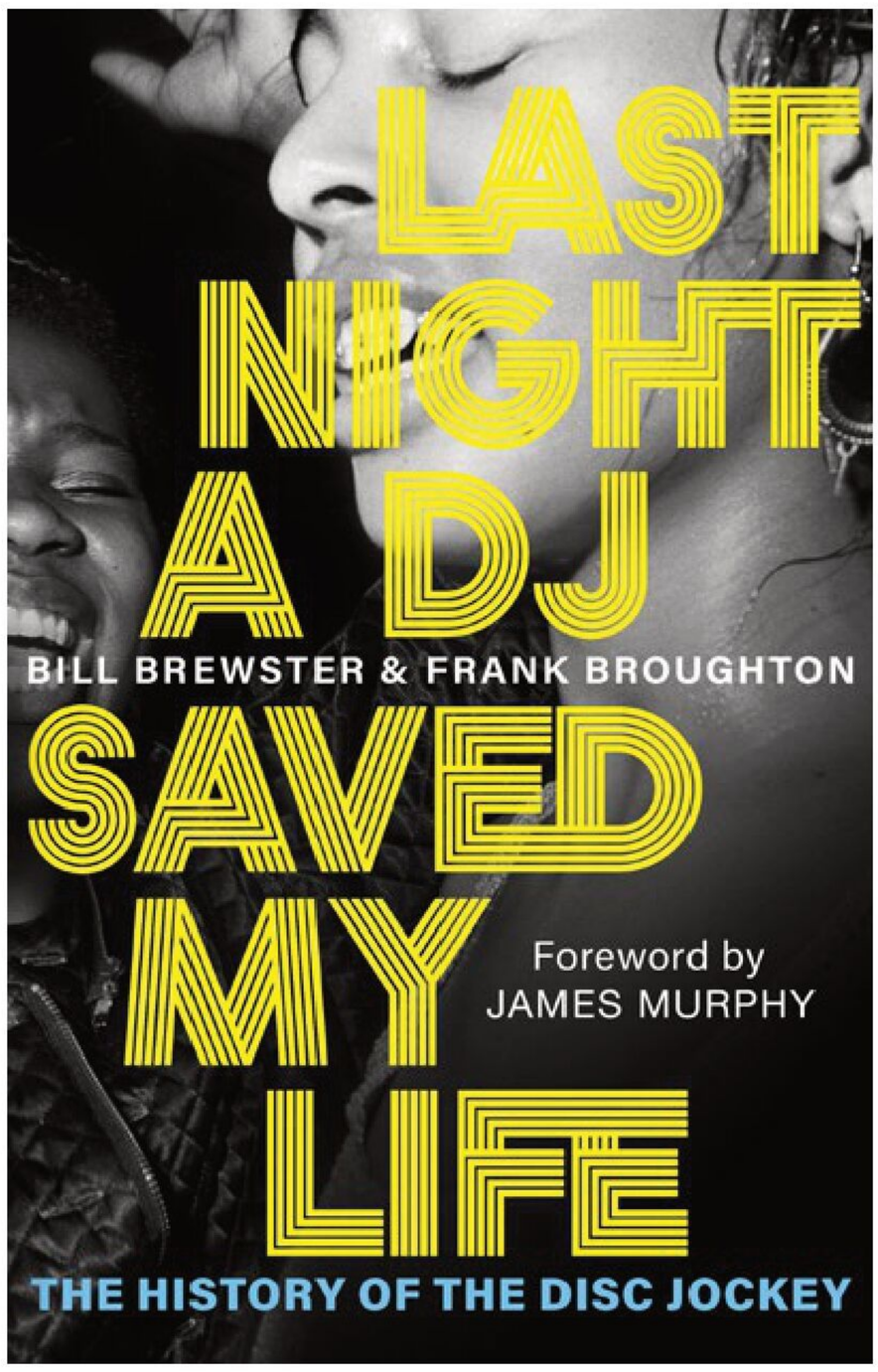
By combining these unique sounds with various effects, and changing their speed and volume, you can form environmental symphonies by just flicking a few switches. Suzuki designed the project in an attempt to remember society's rediscovery of environmental sound during the peacefulness of lockdown, when cars fleetingly left the roads and our acoustic surroundings underwent a temporary transformation.

"We had an intensive experience, not having the freedom to move," the artist explains. "Therefore people became conscious about sounds surrounding us, so I was thinking about the importance of ambience. Also, I thought it was good to create a sound conditioner, like an air conditioner!" **yurisuzuki.com**

IN THE MIX

Classic tome gets a welcome update

First published in 1999, 'Last Night A DJ Saved My Life' is considered the definitive history of dance music, with the role of the DJ rightly taking centre stage. Co-authored by Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, the original book was updated in 2006 to mark 100 years of DJing (the DJ was born on Christmas Eve, 1906, when Canadian Reginald Fessenden became the first person to play a record over the radio). Now, for £30, we're getting another hardback refresh courtesy of White Rabbit Books, with two new chapters and a foreword from LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy, who has said that the original "changed the course of my life". **whiterabbitbooks.co.uk**



TOGETHER FOREVER

Join Beardyman in original Patreon initiative

The ever-changing world of maintaining an online presence can often be a struggle for artists and musicians. But British beatboxer and musician Darren Alexander Foreman, aka Beardyman, is trying something different. Fans now have the option of subscribing to a tier via his Patreon that allows you to not only fund his music, but collaborate in making it with him. Intrigued? Well, for £6.75 per month (plus VAT), Beardyman promises to make a bespoke track based on your influences and suggestions. He will even call you to talk "music, life and the universe", and also have a natter about his inspirations and influences. If you're lucky (and he likes the track), he even promises to include it on his next album. **patreon.com/beardyman**

LANDMARKS

Alex Turnbull talks us through the making of **'Coup'**, the funkin' great 1984 cut from **23 Skidoo**

INTERVIEW: ROBERT HARRIS

"When we recorded 'Coup', the band was me on the main bass riff and timbales, my brother Johnny on guitar, tape loops and congas, Fritz Catlin on drums, and Sketch – Peter Martin – on harmonic bass and also the main chorus theme, which he first came up with as a bass part.

"I originally joined Skidoo as a percussionist, as Fritz was the drummer. But since I also played drums with other bands, it was natural that we would interchange sporadically. When Sam Mills was with us, he and Johnny were both great guitarists and bassists, so the same applied. Nothing was fixed. Everything was fluid. 'The Gospel Comes To New Guinea' [1981 single] and 'Seven Songs' [1982 LP] probably had more improvisation though.

"By the time we came to record 'Urban Gamelan' in 1984, and Sketch had joined the band, we were operating in a slightly more structured way. This was probably a necessary evolution from the completely free-form nature of 'The Culling Is Coming' [1983 LP].

"We met Sketch during 'The Culling' period. We were performing on an experimental TV show called 'Riverside' presented by Perry Haines – an early writer for The Face and i-D – who Sketch was living with. We did some super-outlandish thing with tape loops while Perry interviewed us. He got really freaked out during it, and as he got more worked up, his voice looped back at him.

"Unsurprisingly, it never got aired. Sketch happened to be there, though, and he loved it. He'd just left Linx and was trying to be less commercial – if you know Sketch, he's actually *very* anti-commercial. We, on the other hand, were going in the opposite direction and were trying to find some order in our music. We hit it off immediately, and that was that.

"'Coup' started life as a song called 'Fuck You GI', or 'F U G I'. It was our response to Paul Hardcastle's '19', which had just gone straight to Number One. I actually really liked it and bought it, as I'd just started DJing at the time.

"What rankled us was that '19' was going on about American casualties in the Vietnam war. The vocal sample went something like, 'The average age of the dead American soldier was 19'. We were like, 'Fuck that!'. The average age of the dead Vietnamese was probably much younger, but no one was talking about that. So we took a sample from 'Apocalypse Now' – a Skidoo viewing staple – and used that. It's from the amazing scene where Martin Sheen is in the trenches, and the black GIs are talking about 'Gooks on the wire'. They get 'the Roach' who, just by listening, shoots the Vietnamese soldier who is taunting them from a distance. We looped it so that the dead soldier keeps coming back, as a tribute to the fortitude of the Vietnamese.

"The Vietnamese were – and in many ways still are – vilified, whereas the US troops have had countless films glorifying this horrific and barbaric war, typifying an attitude towards Asians still prevalent in some sections of American society. 'F U G I' was our statement on this insane situation. We decided, however, that we'd also try to make something a little more 'user-friendly' and that's how 'Coup' came about.

"The initial title was '10 Page War' – a headline from The Sun printed during the Falklands War, which was on at the time. It then got renamed 'Coup In The Palace', after another Sun headline, 'Koo In The Palace'. Prince Andrew, or 'Randy Andy' as he was known, was going out with Page Three model Koo Stark, so we kind of reinterpreted it, eventually shortening it to 'Coup'.

"The recording took place at Aosis Studios, in Chalk Farm. It was new to us, and arranged by our label, Illuminated, which was run by Keith Bagley. Back then, Illuminated were the only people who would take a chance and work with us. The label was kind of a one-man operation and was super lo-fi, but 'Coup' would never have been recorded without Keith's support. The session was produced by Simon Boswell. Our earlier releases had been produced by the guys from Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle, but by 1984 we'd lost touch.

"My bass part, which is kind of the backbone, was influenced by Grandmaster Flash & Melle Mel's 'White Lines', which was itself lifted from Liquid Liquid's 'Cavern'. It might not be an obvious association but once you know, it kind of is! The studio had an HH Echo Unit which I put the bass through, giving it that throbbing sound. I can't speak for the others in the band, but I think that sort of set the vibe for the whole track.

"We'd always loved Aswad – they're one of the greatest British reggae bands – so we asked their horn section to sit in on the recording of 'Coup'. Eddie 'Tan Tan' Thornton on trumpet, the mighty Vin Gordon on trombone, and Steve Gregory on sax. I remember when Vin walked in, he was listing all the legendary reggae artists that he'd played with – Bob Marley, Gregory Isaacs and others. We'd bought some weed for the session. They asked to roll a joint and put the whole eighth in one spliff.

"We had to be resourceful – there was no money for long elaborate sessions. 'The Gospel Comes To New Guinea' / 'Last Words' was recorded in a day-and-a-half. 'Seven Songs' was recorded and mixed in three days. 'Coup' was recorded in a single day.

"'Coup' might now be viewed as a 'hit' – or as 'our' hit – but it was hardly feted at the time. The music industry and press still distrusted us after 'The Culling Is Coming', and I think they were reluctant to afford us any visibility. It was almost like, 'You had your chance and you blew it'. When we played 'Coup' live, I think some of our fans were actually a bit annoyed, as they'd just got used to the weird stuff, and it was too funky and commercial. You have to remember this was before funk or hip hop were popular, so we were kind of in a no-win vacuum."

WINGING IT

Electroacoustic synths from NYC

The Cicada is a marvellous invention by New York-based company, Physical Synthesis. Instead of oscillating voltage to create tones like a conventional synthesiser, it uses physical vibrations of wing-like cantilevers against a variety of surfaces to create an astonishing range of sounds. These can then be manipulated, either by making physical adjustments or tactile gestures.

"Cicada was born from a desire to bridge the gap between electronics and acoustics," explains Physical Synthesis' Alex Prignon. "Its core purpose is to offer artists a direct pathway into acoustic synthesis by transforming sound directly through touch." Cicada is available as individual modular components or in sets, ranging from the $995 Cicado Pro Essential to the $2,700 Cicada Founders Edition Extended. Buzz in if you fancy one. **physical-synthesis.com**

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PULSE

WORDCOLOUR

TV composer goes underground

WHO THEY?

London composer and producer Nicholas Worrall began his career composing cues for theatre and TV, his music featuring on programmes like the BBC's 'Gardeners' World' and 'The One Show'. But Worrall subsequently made his move into a different realm of beat-driven electronic music, sampling human voices from film, musique concrète tapes and YouTube clips. His debut EP as Wordcolour, 'Tell Me Something', arrived in 2020 on Barcelona's Lapsus Records, and made waves through the underground club circuit with its gorgeously textured palette, classy arrangements and light humour, while remaining dancefloor-friendly.

WHY WORDCOLOUR?

Worrall's background is in jazz, pop and contemporary classical, and it's this patchwork backdrop that has led to the most interesting moments in his catalogue. His second EP 'Juno Way' illustrates not just an aptitude for lush sonic arrangements, but also a distinct emotional fluency. Inspired by south-east London's Juno Cafe, the track 'Juno' opens with the promise of Autechre-esque beats, yet dissolves into dreamy ambience, before welcoming a flourish of Terry Riley-inspired minimalism complete with polyrhythmic woodwind, pitched percussion and piano.

TELL US MORE...

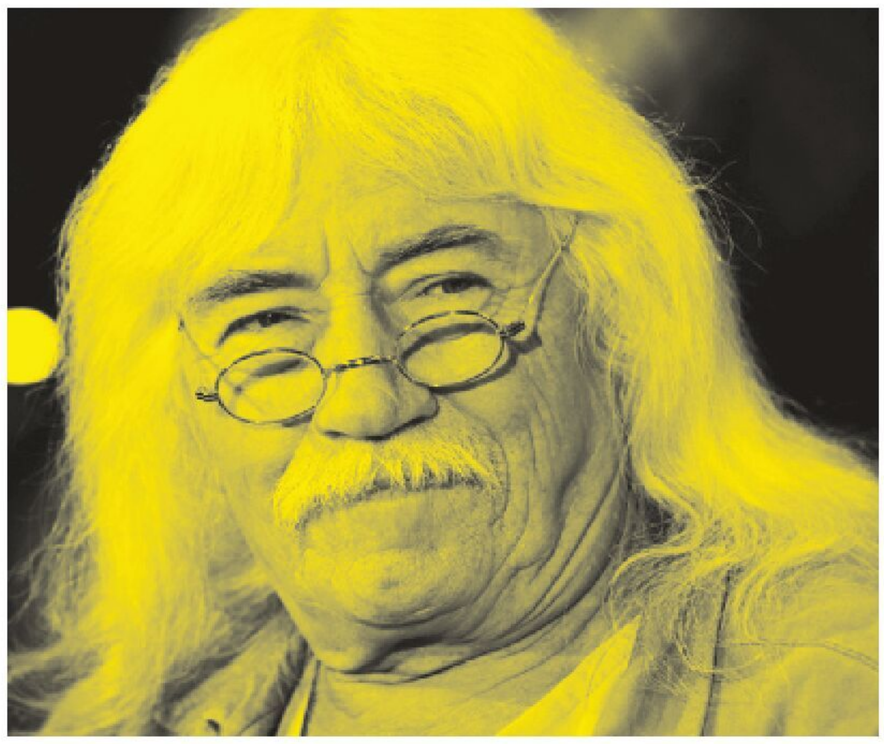
Wordcolour's name is an anglicised portmanteau of 'Word Color', a 1994 piece by American abstract musician Paul Lansky, who Worrall cites as a key influence. Since signing to Fabric imprint Houndstooth and releasing 'Juno Way', the producer laid low over the pandemic, before returning in style this year with the beautifully crafted 'Bluster' in February, followed in April by an accompanying EP featuring remixes by DJ Rum, DJ Python and more. Topping it all off, there's now a new album to look forward to, which is being released at the end of this month. Listening is advised.

WILLIAM STOKES

'The Trees Were Buzzing, And The Grass' is released by Houndstooth on 24 June

ENIGMAS

Sweeping the forgotten corridors of sound, **Scott Blixen** sets his sights on German composer **Reinhard Lakomy**



Imagine, if you will, living in a country where there is but one record company and it's in the iron grip of a totalitarian state. Imagine making music where electronic imports are banned – so no Moogs, Rolands and Korgs, or even Kraftwerk albums for solace. It would be miraculous, then, if anything sublime came from such misery and deprivation, wouldn't it?

These were the conditions under which East German Reinhard Lakomy operated. Along with rock and children's music, classically trained Lakomy recorded three electronic LPs in the 1980s, the first of which reigns supreme. You may think me perverse, but his electronic debut is the most frequently played LP I own. With each listen, I'm overcome by the grace of 'Das Geheime Leben' ('The Secret Life'), which was released in 1982.

I always play side two first. That way, I'm immediately treated to 'Es Wächst Das Gras Nicht Über Alles' ('The Grass Doesn't Grow Over Everything'). Aside from The Human League's 'Dreams Of Leaving', it's the most emotive electronic music I know. Lakomy's best work needn't be judged in the context of dour East German hardship, it's transcendent when measured by any yardstick.

It starts with the tolling of distant bells, before a rampant robot army appears, marching to a proto-acid house beat. Something akin to electronic panpipes guide the troops before they eventually disappear over the horizon. The final three-and-a-half minutes are a blissful reverie of down-tuned guitar and buzzing synths that wash away all human woe. I feel sure an astute film director will use this music one day. It sums up existence with tear-jerking poignancy.

While electronic music was sanctioned by the state-run Amiga label, the tools to make it weren't. Steam-powered Soviet hardware was available to East Germans, but they craved decadent gadgets from the other side of the political divide. By stealth, synths and drum machines were smuggled into the country at great expense and risk to personal liberty.

German reunification meant freedom to millions, but the electronic maestros of the GDR were left high and dry, in a state mechanism that no longer existed. Undaunted, Lakomy forged on until his death in 2013.

In these times of occupation and renewed Kremlin aggression, his music is more pertinent than ever. It's a blessing that original copies of 'Das Geheime Leben' still go for peanuts, as this record has future classic written all over it.

THE BIG REVEAL

Not the "retired Serbian factory worker" we were led to believe, enigmatic synthesist **Abul Mogard** is finally unmasked

WORDS: BRENDAN MCGOWAN

Abul Mogard looks up and waves cheerily as he strides up a dark street in Neukölln, the Turkish enclave in Berlin where we've arranged to meet for a drink ahead of his performance in the city the following day.

The bar is dark inside and appears to be closed, although it's only 7pm. Just then, the bar's owner arrives with her scruffy dog to switch on the lights inside and open up for business. Mogard's timing is perfect, an idea that becomes the theme of our chat over several glasses of German pilsner.

Many fans of Mogard's intense sonic experiments were drawn in, not least by the air of mystery the artist himself helped to create about Abul Mogard's background. He was supposedly an elderly steelworker from Belgrade who had retired after decades of working in a noisy factory, and suddenly discovered he had an extraordinary talent for making albums using sequencers, Farfisa organs and modular synths. It's a cover story that has always stretched credulity, particularly when you listened to the music he was creating.

And yet at the same time, it was a biographical legend which was quoted faithfully across media coverage of each and every Mogard album release. Was the story true? And if not, just who the hell was he?

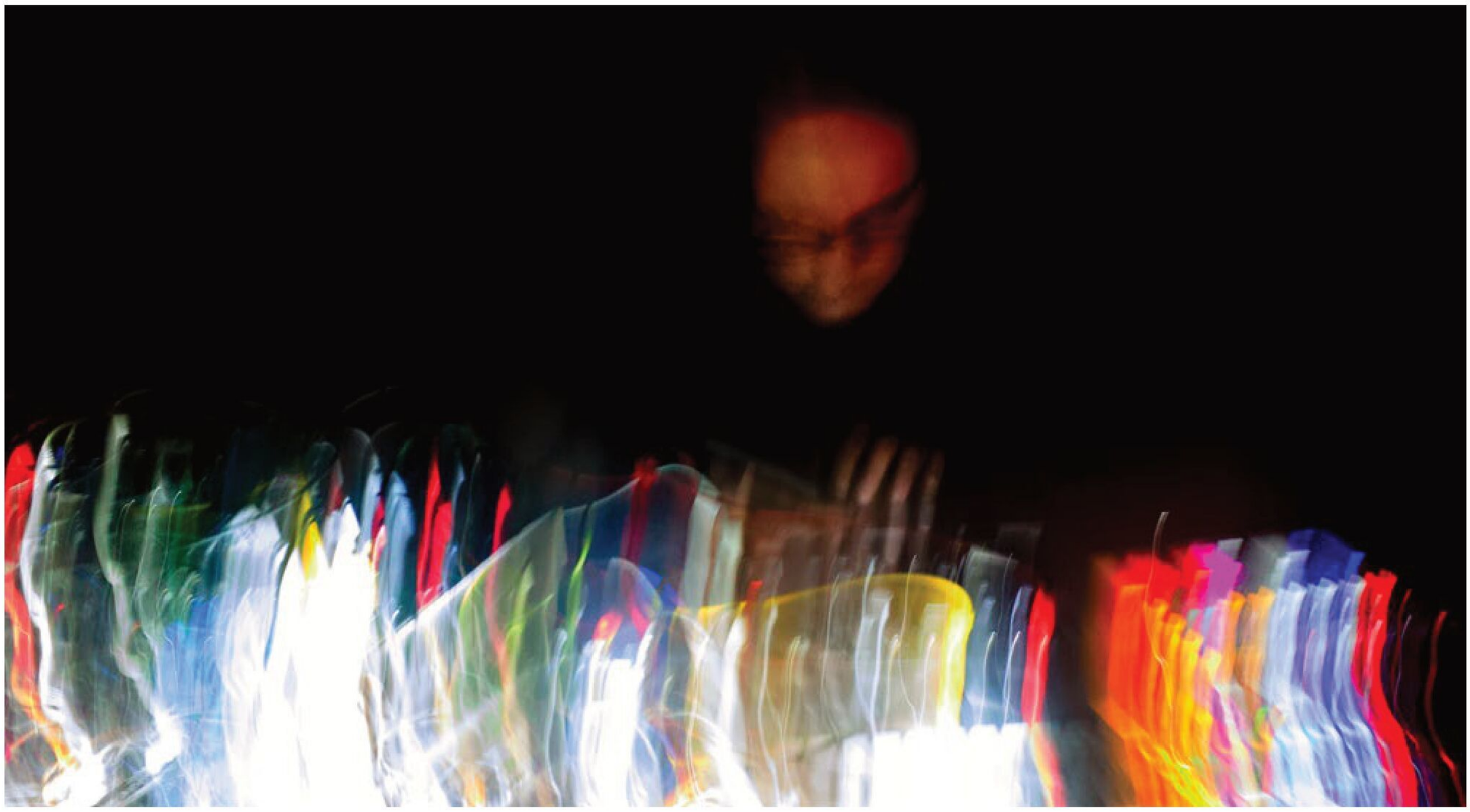
Along the way, it was even suggested that Mogard might be the alter ego of Brian Eno. Throughout it all, for more than a decade, the man himself remained silent on the subject.

But that all changed in January this year when, some 12 years after inventing Abul Mogard, his creator decided it was time to come clean about his real identity.

"It was time to 'come out'," smiles the softly spoken Italian sitting opposite me in the darkening gloom of a Berlin bar.

Guido Zen, his real name, was making music long before the strange and fascinating sounds of his debut album 'Abul Mogard', released on VCO Recordings in June 2012. He was already part of various long-term projects as a music maker, including Gamers In Exile, Brain Machine and later on, Vactrol Park and Potter Natalizia Zen – always as a collaborator, never as a solo artist. So why the shift to an alter ego, and a solo artist at that? And where did Abul Mogard emerge from, if not Belgrade?

Zen is in Berlin to perform at Arkaoda, a venue in Karl-Marx-Platz. It's a small, basement room, and it will be the first time he's performing as Abul



Mogard without heavy make-up, dry ice, dim lighting, and virtually hidden from sight.

At this point, thanks to Covid, face masks are mandatory in Berlin's bars, on public transport and in restaurants. It is notable that Zen is allowing Abul Mogard's mask to slip here, in Berlin of all cities, where the infamous Berlin Wall and Cold War intelligence communities dominated. It seems that a divided city, one shrouded in shadowy secrecy, was as apt a place as any. This evening, Zen wants to open up.

He explains the first Abul Mogard album was born of personal sadness, loss and ill-fortune. Those lucky enough to own a copy of that first 'Abul Mogard' cassette will note it is dedicated to Lucia Zen, the musician's late mother. Her death and other changes in his personal life led to a sudden period of mourning and quiet reflection in the studio. As Zen himself explains, "Making music had become therapeutic and this new music, listened at very high volume in the studio, was soothing me".

The sounds Zen began to make at that point were different to anything he had created before.

"It was completely new and surprising," he says. "And everyone I played the tapes to loved them."

The master recording was released on CD-r and cassette with the assistance of Zen's life partner, visual artist Marja de Sanctis.

"I came up with the name Abul Mogard," reveals Zen. "Don't ask me where I got it from. I honestly have no idea. I also thought he could be from Belgrade. The rest of Abul's biography is all Marja's doing.

"I used the old man and Belgrade simply because I wanted to restart several aspects of my life, including my music. Put simply, I would have loved to hear music made by a man like this. My main intention was to work intuitively and my only reference was to make something I would have listened to myself."

So why has he decided to come clean now, after all this time? In part, maintaining the fiction became a burden. What was initially supposed to be playful, even fun, created unforeseen difficulties over the years.

Face-to-face interviews were obviously unworkable, while interviews conducted online or via email often ended up focusing on Serbia's internal politics. Mogard's world view became uncomfortable and awkward.

In addition, playing live as Abul Mogard became increasingly challenging. "There were times early on where I would have to insist on taxis taking me directly to the back door of a venue, so that I could get access without being seen," Zen smiles. "And then I would always perform behind a screen. It all became ridiculous."

A decade on from the invention of Abul Mogard, his creator is now at a very different stage in his life.

"It didn't make much sense to keep the project going," Zen reasons. "For many years while working in the studio, I would imagine the old man making the sounds I was working on. In the past few years, it hasn't been like that anymore. It feels like the old Abul has finally passed me the torch to continue on my own."

In Arkaoda's Berlin basement, Zen's big moment arrives to a packed and reverent crowd. Mogard is face-to-face with his audience and delivers a sublime set which seems to reference the war in Ukraine in tone and substance. Tracks such as 'Against A White Cloud', 'Black Dust' and 'The Purpose Of Peace' summon reflections of a conflict taking place just across the borders of Europe, while the dying refrains of 'Post-Crisis Remembrance' echo the sirens heard across cities such as Kyiv and Lviv.

It hardly matters that Mogard might not intend this performance to act as a reminder of the suffering and conflict in Ukraine. His solemn, soaring and emotional soundscapes have always contained within them a deeply powerful empathy.

As the set draws to an end with 'On A Shattered Shell Beach', from 2021's 'Immobile Air' album, there are cheers and applause. The lights go up, and a smiling Zen steps out from behind Abul Mogard's darkened desk to accept hugs, slaps on the back and handshakes.

A man of mystery no more, Abul Mogard will carry on making and releasing music. There are plans to work with both new collaborators and old friends later this year, and he continues to have enthusiastic support from high-profile figures such as Thom Yorke and Mary Anne Hobbs. Perhaps 2022 will finally be the year that masks can be consigned to history for all of us.

Abul Mogard's most recent release, a mini-album called 'In A Few Places Along The River', is available on Bandcamp

SUITS YOU

Four decades on from its release, ABC's 'The Lexicon Of Love' is still one of the most luxurious and glorious widescreen pop albums of all time. Frontman Martin Fry takes a break from rehearsals for a 40th anniversary tour to tell the inside story of this enduring classic, starting in a toilet in a Tokyo hotel room...

WORDS: DAVE SIMPSON

ABC

"I t felt like I wasn't wearing the suit. The suit was wearing me. The suit could have done the shows on its own."

Martin Fry is recalling the time when he was suddenly no longer comfortable as the debonair frontman of ABC, one of the most innovative, flamboyant and dashing pop phenomena of the 1980s.

It was 1983 and ABC were in Tokyo, around 50 dates into a global tour showcasing 'The Lexicon Of Love', the band's debut album and a UK Number One that was still in the charts a year after its release. Fry was beginning to feel hemmed in by singing the same songs every night and by the persona he projected – Hollywood style in an iconic gold lamé suit. So he decided to flush his legendary outfit down the loo.

"We were staying in the Keio Plaza Hotel," he remembers. "The Japanese technology was more advanced and the toilets had a wider pan. I'd picked up so much stuff over there, like a Walkman and a watch that looked like a robot, and there simply wasn't room in my case…"

The gold suit went into the bigger pan, round the U-bend, into the sewage system and possibly out to sea – which would have been a strange sight for passing fish and crustaceans.

"To be fair, I had probably lost my mind," Fry chuckles. "But it was definitely a statement. From day one, our manifesto had always been, 'Change is stability, change is strength'. We were very serious young men who thought that to do anything more than four times would make you middle-aged and cabaret."

He briefly pauses, taking a moment to consider the youthful audacity and bravery of it all.

"I think that's a good way of looking at the world when you're young. I've undoubtedly calmed down a bit, but it's good to burn like that."

All these decades later, Martin Fry is getting ready to perform the songs from 'The Lexicon Of Love' again, on a 10-date 40th anniversary tour across the UK, with additional shows in the US and Europe.

The current line-up of ABC will be augmented by the Southbank Sinfonia for the gigs, the orchestra conducted by Anne Dudley, the album's original keyboard player and strings arranger.

As part of his preparations for the tour, Fry listened to specially remastered versions of the tracks in a superior audio environment. He describes it as like being inside a "sphere of music".

"I have to say it was a strange but uplifting experience," he reflects. "It took me back to when we were making the album at Sarm East Studios, but in a way it was like I was finally hearing it how other people perceive it. I've played those songs many times onstage, in many different configurations, but it was fantastic to hear them like that. I really enjoyed it. When you make a record, you're too close to it and you have to let it go. It's for the public to decide whether or not something is a classic."

Which 'Lexicon' has surely become. With an unashamedly ambitious mix of pioneering electronica and old school film star style – not to mention smash hits such as 'Poison Arrow', 'The Look Of Love' and 'All Of My Heart' – it is undeniably one of the most defining collections of its era. The combination of terrific songs and innovative technology still sounds fresh.

Now aged 64, Fry hasn't exactly stood still in the years since. But although ABC have made a total of nine albums, the singer acknowledges that 'The Lexicon Of Love' will always be his 'Citizen Kane' – a masterpiece of a debut against which all his other activity is judged.

"I'm not here to sell it as 'my classic', though," he says. "I'm just a small cog in the machine."

The story of how 'Lexicon' was made is quite a tale and Fry was recently reminded of how far he's travelled, when he was performing on a cruise ship off Orlando and came across a red vinyl copy of the Sex Pistols' 'Never Mind The Bollocks'.

"I had a digital record player with me, so I put the album on. It sounded fantastic, but then I had an out of body experience. I thought, 'Well, here you are, 45 years down the line'."

He was a teenager in Stockport when he'd been lucky enough to catch the Sex Pistols' second gig at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall in July 1976, an event also attended by Ian Curtis, Mark E Smith, John Cooper Clarke, Mick Hucknall and Tony Wilson. Bernard Sumner, Peter Hook and Morrissey had seen the seminal punk band at the same venue the previous month, a concert promoted by Howard Devoto and Pete Shelley from the Buzzcocks, who went on to support the Pistols at the July show.

Fry had just started seeing live bands – "Tangerine Dream, Dr Feelgood, The Sensational Alex Harvey Band – who were!" – but nothing compared to witnessing the first stirrings of punk.

"John Lydon was incredible," Fry says. "He came out looking quite Dickensian. He stared at the audience and went, 'You're all a bunch of fucking statues'. And then just stood there. I've never seen anything as confrontational. Then they started their first song and it was mind-blowing. It was my road to Damascus moment. After that, everything else seemed dated."

Three years later, Fry was studying English Literature at the University of Sheffield (who made him an Honorary Doctor of Music in 2012) and it was here that he met Mark White and Stephen Singleton, the three of them going on to form the core of ABC. At that point, though, White and Singleton were an electronic duo called Vice Versa, who Fry interviewed for his fanzine, Modern Drugs. As he tells it, Vice Versa were looking for someone to play keyboards and Yvonne Pawlett, who had been in The Fall and was friends with Singleton, was coming over at the weekend, but they suddenly asked Fry if he fancied it – despite him not actually being a keyboard player.

"I'm thinking that maybe I got her gig," he grins.

Few who saw the starkly electronic trio at the time would have imagined they'd be a chart act within two years. Vice Versa's 'Music 4' EP (recorded before Fry joined the group) and their contribution to '1980: The First 15 Minutes' (also featuring fellow unsigned Sheffield bands Clock DVA, I'm So Hollow and Stunt Kites) had earmarked them as left-field John Peel favourites. Their underground credentials were strengthened when they appeared at the Futurama 2 festival in Leeds in 1980 alongside a host of emerging electronic outfits, including the recently formed Soft Cell (Steel City pioneers Cabaret Voltaire and The Wirral's Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark having played at the first Futurama in 1979).

They were all initially dubbed – not always positively – "the synth brigade". But after Gary Numan's Tubeway Army scored a Number One hit with 'Are "Friends" Electric?', people realised such artists could actually be popular as well as voguish.

"Vice Versa were on the cusp of something big," Fry asserts. "We were part of the same scene as OMD and Depeche Mode… but then we just vacated it."

Significantly, the trio had observed the development of their Sheffield peers The Human League from weird alternative types into the slick synthpop group who would soon top the UK charts with 'Don't You Want Me'. Fry admits he felt "in their shadow", but it took a trip to the Netherlands to spark their own radical transformation. Future Haçienda DJ and M People lynchpin Mike Pickering was living over there and had arranged some gigs for them in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

"We'd been jamming a lot and we met this guy who invited us to use his studio," Fry says.

Although Mark White was Vice Versa's vocalist and Fry had never sung before, he had a go during that studio session. It was a revelation to them all.

"Mark always says he handed the microphone over to me after that moment."

With a new singer and thoughts of a new direction, the trio returned to Sheffield buzzing with plans and possibilities.

ABC

"The idea was to sound like James Brown and David Bowie," Fry explains. "And have lyrics that reflected our surroundings – that postmodern English vibe. Fusing those two elements became an obsession for us. We pulled in a bass player and a drummer and redesigned the whole thing."

Fry claims that the speed of the metamorphosis was such that NME's Paul Morley reviewed them live as Vice Versa "and by the time we met him for an interview we'd become ABC". The line-up of the group evolved quickly too, with the bassist leaving and the original drummer replaced by David Palmer, a brilliant youth prodigy they'd heard about from club bands. As Fry describes it, the scene – and ABC – were changing virtually every week.

"In those days, it felt like we were going from matt to gloss," he notes. "It was this concept of internationalism and being really positive about the world."

With the UK economy in recession and both inflation and unemployment rising sharply, there was perhaps good reason for that. Fry claims they felt part of "a generation who had been ignored".

"Something that was of great concern to us was the fact that The Clash had never been on 'Top Of The Pops'. So when you get to us and people like Depeche Mode, Duran Duran and mid-period Dexy's, there was this idea that we could reinvent whatever we wanted to. We had all been on the dole and I'd worked at Batchelors in Sheffield, dehydrating peas in the factory, but we believed in self-fulfilling prophecies."

Manifestos were decided and battle lines were drawn. Leather trousers and rock music were 70s and out. Influences such as ZE Records, Grace Jones and James Chance were in. The future would be DIY, but glamorous.

"We tried to make everything beautiful with postmodernism," Fry says. "You could buy an old leather overcoat from Oxfam and I think Bowie's 'The Man Who Fell To Earth' had a lot to do with our style. And no one was going to stop us. I didn't want to sing about pylons or alienation. I wanted to sing about love affairs gone wrong."

In the scene they'd sprung from, this was an extreme step to take. Although they were now thinking of themselves as a "radical dance faction", they were still playing insalubrious venues like the George IV pub on Sheffield's Infirmary Road, while The Human League, Clock DVA, Artery et al watched on.

"Those were the toughest gigs we ever played," Fry recalls. "The Hollywood Bowl was much easier! In Sheffield, there'd be 200 people watching us… and 180 of them were in other bands."

Many of the songs they played, songs that are now copper-bottomed classics, were written in a couple of abandoned houses. Vice Versa had rehearsed in Stephen Singleton's mum's flat, but ABC had a drummer and needed to make more noise, so they decamped to the derelict terrace that Fry shared with a DJ known as Disco John.

"Because the two terraces next to mine were empty, we were able to expand and take over the lot," he says.

It was here that "around 80 per cent" of 'The Lexicon Of Love' came together. 'Poison Arrow' was in the live set very early on and 'The Look Of Love' came shortly after. 'Tears Are Not Enough' began life as a "funk rant" and 'All Of My Heart' started out as "a country and western number we would have never dared to play on West Street", the epicentre of Sheffield's nightlife.

Meanwhile, the growing hubbub around the band meant that music industry moguls such as Muff Winwood from CBS would show up at the old houses, parking their limos on the battered street outside.

"It seems surreal in retrospect," Fry admits. "Back then, it was just where I lived."

The major record company scramble for ABC ended when the band were snapped up by Phonogram. Their first output was 'Tears Are Not Enough', a track somewhere between new romantic and white funk which reached Number 19 in the UK singles chart in October 1981. By now, the group looked and sounded impossibly sophisticated, although the reality was they were only on £50 a week when they first went on 'Top Of The Pops'. That was less than Fry had earned at Batchelors.

"We were staying in places like the Columbia, but we didn't have enough to eat," Fry says, referring to London's infamous rock hotel, where rooms with six beds would become the source of in-fighting for many a young band. "I met Marc Almond and David Ball there. And The Associates. And Van Morrison walked in one night. It was bonkers, but fantastic."

Glamorous it wasn't, but the success of the single validated Phonogram's faith in the group and ensured the label would fund an album. Fry corrects a common misconception that production whizz-kid Trevor Horn (who would subsequently take Frankie Goes To Hollywood to successive Number Ones) "waved a magic wand" and turned ABC into a pop outfit. In fact, as the Steve Brown-produced 'Tears Are Not Enough' suggested, they were more or less fully formed. What they needed was someone who could help realise their dreams.

As Fry puts it, Horn's crucial role on 'The Lexicon Of Love' was "to knit the fog, to make it happen". At that point, Horn was the young producer on the rise, having been in the late 70s line-up of Yes and then scoring a huge hit with 'Video Killed The Radio Star' as half of The Buggles. ABC were drawn to him mainly because of his work with Dollar, the chart steamrollering duo consisting of David Van Day and Thereza Bazar.

"'Hand Held In Black And White', 'Give Me Back My Heart' and 'Videotheque' were sonic delights," Fry smiles.

One of the 1980s' most significant encounters between an artist and a producer occurred in, of all places, Pizza Express.

"I had dinner with Trevor a couple of weeks ago and he's exactly the same now as he was then," Fry says. "Great sense of humour. When we met him, he seemed to instantly understand what we were about. I think he knew we were onto something."

Operating out of London's hi-tech Sarm East studios, Horn had all the latest gear, including a Fairlight CMI, the digital synthesiser that introduced sampling technology to pop. As Fry tells it, the ahead-of-the-game producer ran everything through the Fairlight, although the band weren't entirely unfamiliar with this way of working.

"We'd been recording on a two-track and we were used to bouncing from track to track. So with Trevor, I suppose it just felt totally comfortable."

Fry talks about how Fairlight programmer JJ Jeczalik, who was later in The Art Of Noise, sampled material from the radio and recorded running water from the nearby Thames for the middle of 'Poison Arrow'.

"Nowadays you can do that stuff on your phone, but in 1981 or 1982 it was revolutionary."

When they couldn't create the sounds they dreamed of, Trevor Horn brought musicians in. Anne Dudley, another future member of The Art Of Noise, initially arrived as a piano player, but turned strings arranger after Fry said he wanted the songs to have orchestration, like his favoured Motown or Philly soul records, or David Bowie's 'Sorrow'.

"So she went home and came back the following day with all the parts. The next thing I knew, we were laying strings down at Abbey Road… and that made it swing. Anne is an incredible musician."

The orchestration was unlikely to go down well with the post-punk crowd they'd had as Vice Versa. But that didn't trouble ABC. They had a new target audience now.

"We wanted to compete with the Americans," Fry declares. "We wanted to be played in Barnsley and in Detroit. We had this mythical girl in Barnsley who had mainstream tastes and we'd ask ourselves if she would like it. People such as The Normal and The Pop Group had never got in the charts, so that's what we wanted to do. We weren't short of ambition or ego."

The album production costs were mounting – Fry doesn't know the exact figure but he suspects 'Lexicon' came in at £60,000 for around 10 weeks of recording and mixing – and a lot of money also went on taxis to get the band from the Columbia to Sarm East. With pop progressing every week, time was of the essence.

"It wasn't cheap, but it never spiralled into insanity figures like a lot of things did in the 80s," Fry notes.

And throughout the process, he noticed that Horn had a manifesto of his own.

"Trevor would say, 'A record will last forever. Once you're done, all people remember is the work'."

As 'Poison Arrow' climbed the UK charts in March 1982, ABC did 'Top Of The Pops' on the Thursday before grabbing a cab back to the studio to keep working on the album. They'd often record on the run, holing up at Sarm East at night or, if it was booked, heading to RAK Studios. They also used Tony Visconti's Good Earth Studios, which was where they were recording 'The Look Of Love' when they had an unexpected visit from none other than David Bowie. Bowie, whose father was from Doncaster, spoke to ABC in a perfectly mimicked Yorkshire accent.

"I missed him, because I was at Record Mirror promoting 'Poison Arrow'," Fry sighs. "But the way that Mark White tells it, he was in the toilets, standing at the urinal, when this bloke came in and said, 'Ah, pissing with the big dogs are we?'. That was Bowie. He then said, 'Ah, you're from Sheff. Me dad's from Donneh'."

Forty years on, Fry is still incredulous at this encounter.

"You've got to imagine the impact of Bowie back then. It was like an asteroid hit."

Bowie had been working with Visconti on his 'Baal' EP of Bertolt Brecht songs. He listened to what ABC were doing and offered them a few suggestions, such as including answerphone messages on 'The Look Of Love'.

"He suggested having this forlorn guy in the song leaving messages that she doesn't answer," Fry says. "It was a great idea, but we never got round to it."

He likes to think that Bowie "sprinkled some of his Ziggy stardust" on the track, though. Instead, he ended up doing a "little soliloquy" of his own, something inspired by the "Jesus, this is Iggy" spoken word section of 'Turn Blue' on Iggy Pop's 'Lust For Life'.

"So there's a point in 'The Look Of Love' where I go, 'Martin, maybe one day you'll find true love'," he laughs. "I mean, how the hell did I get away with that? It was very James Brown. You're not just the singer, you have to introduce yourself into the song as well."

Such lyrical twists aside, it turns out that the multitude of betrayals and unrequited loves in the 'Lexicon' songbook were all real – or at least rooted in real-life incidents.

"That's the way it is in your teenage years," Fry says. "With songs, you take something and amplify it, so there has to be some truth in there. The core emotion is authentic, but I wasn't as lovelorn or fey as people assumed. I wasn't walking around Sheffield reading the romantic poets."

All the same, he concedes that songs like 'Poison Arrow' and 'The Look Of Love' offer more than memorable tunes. They mirror people's lives and they connected with a big enough audience to take 'The Lexicon Of Love' straight to the top of the UK charts, a period he describes as "a whirlwind". For Fry, a massive Roxy Music fan, it certainly felt significant when his band's magnum opus replaced Roxy's 'Avalon' in pole position.

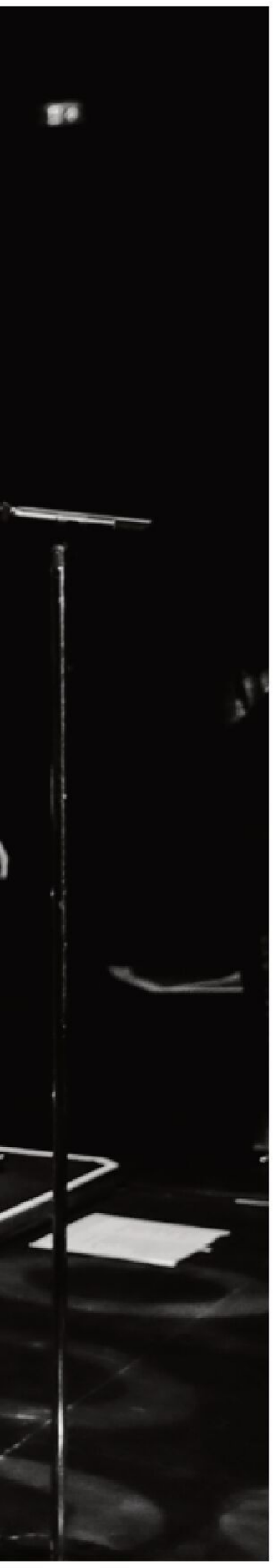
The rest of it was a blur of gigs, travel, interviews and gold lamé. ABC even shot a short film, 'Mantrap', directed by Julien Temple, who had made 'The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle', the Sex Pistols' movie. They envisaged it as an "Eastern Bloc James Bond".

"You don't have time to enjoy it in the pub with your mates," Fry reflects. "And when you do, they don't really understand what's been happening to you. So it takes a couple of years to unravel… but it was a fantastic experience."

After the gold lamé suit went down the loo in Tokyo, Fry intended the 1983 follow-up album to 'The Lexicon Of Love' to be "the same sort of transition as Vice Versa to ABC". Returning to Sheffield and seeing the place they'd left behind made them want to document how they felt about that. So where 'Lexicon' had been "glitz and glam", 'Beauty Stab' was "raw and black and white". It wasn't generally well-received.

"We made a more abrasive record," Fry says. "But we could have made an even more abrasive record and ended up between the two camps. It was a bit rushed, but no excuses and no regrets."

Fry is amused – but not quite convinced – by the reputation of 'Beauty Stab' as one of the greatest career self-sabotages of all time – "Give us the trophy!" he laughs – but the album reached the UK Top 20 and spawned two Top 40 singles, 'That Was Then But This Is Now' and the superb 'SOS', so it was hardly a disaster. By then, however, David Palmer had joined Yellow Magic Orchestra (although he'd frequently come back), with Stephen Singleton deciding he also wanted to leave the group soon after the record came out.



Still, ABC were far from done. 'How To Be A… Zillionaire!' (1985) didn't do much in the UK, but it gave them their biggest US hit ever with 'Be Near Me', while the presentation of the band as cartoon characters pointed the way to Damon Albarn's Gorillaz. 'Alphabet City' (1987) produced another smash with 'When Smokey Sings', a tribute to Motown legend Smokey Robinson. Fry even showed a copy of the single to his hero when they appeared on the same TV show in the Netherlands.

"I had an Anthony Price suit on and I knocked on his dressing room door clutching the seven-inch. He seemed surprised that we'd written a song about him. Three weeks later, we met him again in Los Angeles. We were both in the US Top Five and he sent us a lovely handwritten note on Motown headed paper."

Some years later, Fry visited the Motown museum in Detroit and was thrilled to see 'When Smokey Sings' alongside The Clash's 'Hitsville UK' in a section about great artists influenced by the label.

After a brush with cancer in the late 80s and Mark White's departure from the band after 'Abracadabra' in 1991, Fry had a "lean period" in the 90s, before gradually realising "people wanted to hear ABC again". A concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London featuring 'The Lexicon Of Love' in its entirety in 2009 was a particular triumph and he's hardly stopped touring since, playing everywhere from Butlin's to Wembley.

In 2016, he finally made the album that many had wanted him to do in 1983. The heavily orchestrated 'The Lexicon Of Love II' returned ABC to the UK Top Five for the first time in three decades. There may yet be a third 'Lexicon', although he says, "I don't want to dial it in – sometimes it's good to not have a safety net". For the time being, material from both albums, including all of the tracks on the original 'Lexicon', will form part of a 22-song setlist on the anniversary tour.

So will Martin Fry be getting himself a new gold lamé suit for the occasion?

"I actually did have another," he reveals. "It was stolen in Coventry, before the trip to Tokyo. But I do have one upstairs at home now, under lock and key."

It could possibly find itself back in the public eye at some point, though.

"I was really impressed when I went to the Victoria And Albert Museum and saw some Adam Ant stuff there," he adds. "I thought to myself, 'That's the place for the gold suit'."

'The Lexicon Of Love' 40th anniversary tour starts on 17 June at the New Theatre in Oxford, continuing in the UK throughout the month. For full details of the dates, visit abcmartinfry.com

SEEING STARS

BLUEDOT PREVIEW

Returning to Cheshire's iconic Jodrell Bank after a two-year break, Bluedot 2022 promises another heady mix of music, science, culture and cosmic adventures. We talk to Ben Robinson and Teresa Anderson, the founders of the festival, and grab a quick chat with a few of this year's main attractions...

WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES

BEN ROBINSON
FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

Bluedot festival director Ben Robinson is holding a pair of line-up posters. At first, they appear to be the same, but on closer inspection they turn out to be for two very different events. One, he explains, is the flyer for Bluedot 2020 (which took place online). The other is the flyer for Bluedot 2022, the fifth edition of the award-winning festival, due to take place from 21 to 24 July.

"I could have done a degree in the time since I walked off site after the last Bluedot!" he reflects. "Now it feels really surreal to actually just… plan the festival. To do the work."

Robinson and his team are energised, and so should they be. For a festival director, particularly one with his excellent track record (Kendal Calling is among his previous successes), the pandemic has been a deeply frustrating and worrying stumbling block.

"Working on Bluedot is the main thing I do," he says. "But it hasn't physically existed in space and time since July 2019. We've been through weeks of wondering whether festivals will ever come back, or if gigs will ever be the same. Then we've had issues with the supply chain because of Brexit and Covid. It's costing about 30 per cent more than it did to produce the same show previously."

Such existential hurdles have done little to hinder Bluedot's impending return, however, or to quell Robinson's boyish excitement at having augmented 2020's rollover line-up with a further array of great acts.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing Mogwai, who are one of my all-time favourite bands," he reveals. "I saw them for the first time at Bestival in 2009, and I was just blown away. Fantastic! They were on the initial mock-up poster for the festival – back when we were first thinking up what Bluedot might look like. Spiritualized as well. Björk was in the frame from day one, but we never thought we'd be able to land her because it was a small festival. Kelly Lee Owens is also in a really cool place – Anna Meredith, too."

Curating the line-up for Bluedot isn't the same as it is for other festivals. Here, with science and culture also part of the mix, the festival's music programme looks across the boundaries of demographic and age group, and speaks to something much more unifying – a mindset.

For Robinson, everything about Bluedot is auspicious, not least its inspiring location in the shadow of the giant Grade I listed Lovell Telescope.

"It is a bit crazy, isn't it?" he says. "We go for site visits, and every time we're like, 'Whoa, do we actually do a festival here?'. We originally scouted Jodrell Bank out as a potential album launch location for 'Valhalla Dancehall' by British Sea Power [now Sea Power]. Jodrell said to us, 'Well, we don't have a venue or do gigs, so we can't really help'.

"But then Teresa Anderson, the co-founder of Bluedot, called us back a while after and said, 'I've been thinking about you guys. We're opening a new visitor centre, we really want to get different people down, a different audience demographic'. So we said, 'OK! We do amazing music festivals. You guys have got an incredible site and do amazing science engagement – let's see if we can mix those two things together'.

"I took a lot of the ideas for what the festival should be from just being on site, seeing the telescope and the sense of wonder it created and going, 'How do we articulate this into a festival experience?'. We considered the spirit of innovation and thought, 'We want all the artists to be pushing boundaries or to be innovative'. So we had Jean-Michel Jarre, and then Orbital actually reformed to do the show. We thought that was just a really good way of curating it, looking through the history of music. It's also got to feel like a soundtrack to going into outer space. So we played around with that in the curation as well."

Robinson and Anderson's determination to overcome barriers is central to Bluedot's vision. The festival's inception, Robinson explains, could not have come about at a more critical time, converging with world events that sought only to erect boundaries, not to break them.

"We launched in 2016 with the idea of the Pale Blue Dot, and of having that perspective of our all being one, on one planet," he says. "Then Brexit happened, right at the time we announced it. And then there was the concept of 'fake news' circulating – it's crazy to see what science and the very idea of truth have been through.

"When we began designing Bluedot, we had this little mission statement of what it should be about – to inspire and entertain," Robinson continues. "Over the last two years, science on the news has meant something quite heavy. I've always found it difficult to get people to be animated and involved in things if they're just… weighed down. So what we try to do with Bluedot is be inspiring and entertaining, getting people to lean into that kind of subject matter and be energised. To look at the issues of the world and then have a drink and chat."

Exploring real-world scientific issues may be key to Bluedot, but for Robinson and Anderson, hands-on fun and good music are just as much ends in themselves as they are platforms for those important dialogues. It's a fine balancing act and, so far, one that's been achieved with much finesse.

"In a festival environment, when you put people in front of stages with music, they're open to different experiences," says Robinson. "But also, you've got this terrific programme of speakers. The physicist Jim Al-Khalili did a talk at Bluedot 2019 at 2pm on Saturday, and there were 6,000 people standing in front of the main stage, listening to him talk about the concept of time. It's that kind of open environment. It's really crazy."

TERESA ANDERSON
FESTIVAL CO-FOUNDER

"So, as the Voyager mission approaches the edge of the solar system, Carl Sagan gets it to turn back and take a series of 'family photographs' of the planets. The photo of Earth is very famous. It's really boring because it's just a fuzzy mass of space, but in the middle of it there's a tiny little pale blue pixel in the vastness – and that's Earth."

Professor Teresa Anderson is recounting the origins of Bluedot's name, a reference to Carl Sagan's now-canonical 'Pale Blue Dot' thesis. Sagan's maxim – "That's here. That's home. That's us." – may have become liturgical for marijuana-fuelled stargazing, but for Anderson, the message has never been more pertinent.

"It's the only place we know where life exists," she continues. "So we had better look after it. It's a precious thing! And if we harm the planet, if we're horrible to each other… Bluedot is about celebrating creativity and cooperation, science and the arts, being together, which we've missed over the last few years – the good things in life. Enjoying music, but creating a better future as well."

As founder and director of the Jodrell Bank Centre For Engagement, Anderson's role places her right at the outward-facing edge of the science community. With a degree in physics, an MA in fine art and a PhD in electrical engineering, she's more than qualified for the job. The centre has welcomed many thousands of visitors since opening its doors in 2011, and with a brand new gallery launching this summer, it continues to grow.

The £21 million First Light Pavilion will tell the story of Jodrell Bank in the context of the evolution of astronomy, right from "the days when people first looked up at the sky and said, 'What's that?'," as Anderson puts it.

Her humorous and informal way of explaining vastly complex things is emblematic of her gift as a communicator and her aptitude as an ambassador for science. It's what led Anderson and her husband, astrophysicist Professor Tim O'Brien, to found Bluedot festival.

"People don't know whether it's a music festival, a science festival, or a whatever festival!" she says. "And that's the point. It's about mixing it up and seeing what happens. I'm nominally in charge of the science, but it overlaps with everything. Venn diagrams going off all over the place."

Plenty of musicians on this year's line-up fit the Bluedot manifesto.

"Hannah Peel is one of my absolute favourites!" says Anderson, excitedly. "I used to have 'Mary Casio: Journey To Cassiopeia' on a loop. Now I've got 'The Unfolding' on a loop. It's just absolutely fab, especially since it's with the Paraorchestra, because they're about crushing boundaries. And the point of crushing boundaries is to include everybody."

For Anderson, this breaking down of barriers between science and art is a return to values.

"If you go back through history, there's a long tradition of the scientist as performer," she expounds. "Galileo used to do public talks, and in the Victorian era it was after-dinner entertainment to have a scientist come and explode something or show you an electrical spark flying across the room.

"I think Bluedot is in the middle of that heritage of presenting things to people. People need a bit more access to science, and to have an opinion. Because a lot of our future depends on tech, I think it's quite important that we actually have a say in how we want it to work and how we feel about it – and that we all feel confident about it."

In the 21st century, there are few better conduits for this than a buzzy outdoor festival.

"If people go to Bluedot and meet some nice scientists standing there covered in mud, drinking a pint of beer, they might think, 'Oh, they're just a person!'. It's about humanising it. It's not 'big tech exploiting everybody', or whatever. It's the sense that it's part of life, and you do have a say. Actually, it's quite a laugh. And very creative, like music."

Among the mud-covered pint-quaffers at this year's festival will be Libby Jackson, Human Spaceflight and Microgravity Programme Manager for the UK Space Agency, Professor Richard Betts, Head of Climate Impacts in the Met Office Hadley Centre, the British Antarctic Survey, whose stationed researchers Anderson is hoping festival-goers will be able to talk to live, and celebrated British astronaut Tim Peake, described by Anderson simply as "a lovely bloke".

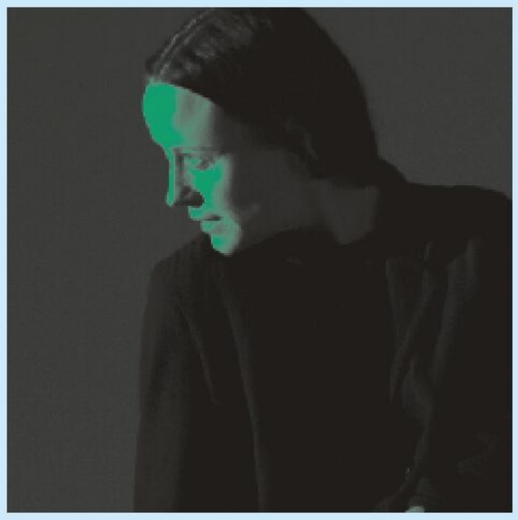
"He came to Jodrell years ago with the BBC for 'Stargazing Live'," she adds. "We've all been trying to get him back since but, you know, he's been… in space."

Bluedot's totem, of course, is the magnificent Lovell Telescope. Built in the 1950s, it was the largest and most innovative instrument of its type in the world, and remains a leader in its field to this day.

"It works on its own, but also as part of a big network of telescopes across the UK," explains Anderson. "It's a really collaborative way of zooming in and looking across the vastness of space. Our telescopes are also linked with telescopes across Europe and the world, and sometimes they link to radio telescopes on satellites. So what you end up with is a telescope that's as big as the planet."

With its majestic design and cutting-edge research, and as the focal point for a global science community, the Lovell Telescope epitomises what Bluedot is all about.

"It's picking up signals that have been travelling at the speed of light for thousands, millions and billions of years," says Anderson. "Things that have come from the very dawn of the universe. And that's all happening while you're sitting there watching Björk!"



BLUEDOT: A BRIEF ENCOUNTERS SPECIAL

A quick-fire chat with some of this year's Bluedot artists

JOSEPH MOUNT
Metronomy

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"I guess it's the massive telescope. Telescopes are my first love – I'm an amateur astronomer, so I'll be happy to rub shoulders with astronauts."

What can we expect from your set?
"We're still buzzing from the excitement of being able to play shows again, so I think you can expect an excitable band playing a sort of greatest hits set."

Your must-see acts?
"I'll be checking out Björk, Porridge Radio, Jockstrap, A Guy Called Gerald and Nature Walks."

Tell us a festival secret...
"I once stole some wine from the Pet Shop Boys' rider."

HANNAH PEEL

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"*Everything* – science, outer space and most importantly the connection we have to music as human beings. Our alien selves love to be filled with the sounds of our planet. Finally being back onstage and with a festival audience is really exciting."

What can we expect from your set?
"To be taken by the orchestra, synths and lights to a place that feels like you are unfolding, as the universe folds into you."

Your must-see acts?
"Spiritualized, Working Men's Club, Squarepusher, Lanterns On The Lake and The Eccentronic Research Council with Maxine Peake – they're all artists I adore but have never seen live."

KEELEY FORSYTH

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"I used to go to Jodrell Bank as a child, and was struck by the fascination for space. Bluedot is a return to that happy place."

What can we expect from your set?
"My performances are served as a symbolic role to the albums. I enjoy approaching my set as a theatre piece, to create something simple through storytelling."

Your must-see acts?
"The Eccentronic Research Council and Maxine Peake – they are my talented friends."

Tell us a festival secret...
"My best memories revolve around eating cheese."

CLAMS BAKER JR
Warmduscher

What can we expect from your Bluedot set?
"Pure energy, new songs and plenty of swearing."

Your must-see acts?
"Björk and A Certain Ratio. There's a lot of weird backstory with Björk, so hopefully we can say hello."

Tell us a festival-related story...
"The first time we played Bluedot, we went to the wrong Jodrell spot – we were already late and panicking. Then Quicksand gave the van driver a postcode, but he didn't realise it was for another festival he was playing later that week with Fat White Family. So we drove an hour-and-a-half out of the way, then drove a million miles per hour back to Bluedot and made it just in time to go on stage. Hoping this one will be much smoother!"

JANE WEAVER

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"The location, and performing by a huge telescope that investigates radio waves in outer space is pretty wild. It appeals to the space rock part of my brain."

What can we expect from your set?
"Loud synths and probably a jumpsuit or something space-themed."

Your must-see acts?
"Squarepusher – I'm sure I've not seen him live before. I also like to just wander around from stage to stage without a plan. I've discovered loads of gems by accident this way in the past."

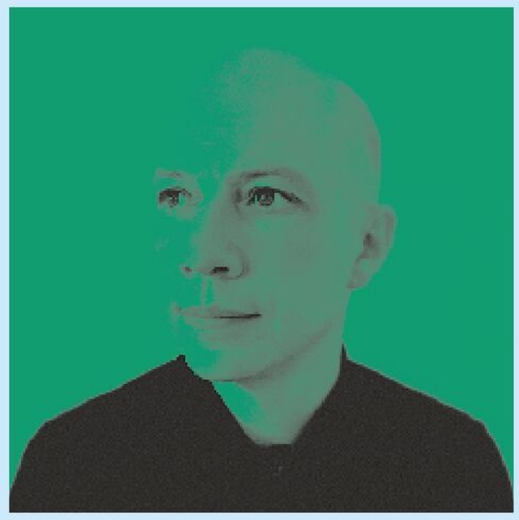
Tell us a festival-related story...
"At Reading Festival in the 1990s, I spent all my petrol money – meant for getting my friend and myself home in my campervan – on booze. We made the decision on the last night whilst drunk. The next morning, we lied to the RAC and said we'd broken down. They didn't believe us, of course."

MARTIN MOSCROP
A Certain Ratio

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"The Jodrell Bank Observatory is such an iconic location, with its giant Lovell Telescope and epic landscape. It's the perfect place for a festival so we're thrilled to be playing."

What can we expect from your set?
"We have 44 years' worth of songs, so expect a mix. Some songs will send your head sideways to Jupiter and others will make you unable to stop moving your feet."

Your must-see acts?
"The line-up is immense and we're made-up to be sharing the same stage as Warmduscher and Björk. We are obviously excited about seeing our fellow north-westerners LoneLady and Jane Weaver too, as well as our labelmate HAAi."



STUART BRAITHWAITE
Mogwai

What are you looking forward to most at Bluedot?
"I've been to the festival before and loved it. My dad was a telescope-maker, and the idea of playing in front of a huge telescope really appeals to me."

What can we expect from your set?
"A mix of old and new songs, and projections onto the telescope."

Your must-see acts?
"I'm excited to see Spiritualized and Elisabeth Elektra."

Bluedot takes place from 21-24 July at Jodrell Bank Observatory in Macclesfield, Cheshire. For more, visit discoverthebluedot.com

THE TEMPEL OF THE KING

In this final UK interview before his recent passing, the hugely influential German electronicist Klaus Schulze reflects on his time with Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel and discusses the lingering influence of the sci-fi classic 'Dune' – as heard on his new album, 'Deus Arrakis'

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

Klaus Schulze's final record is undoubtedly the sound of an artist coming full circle, though it was never intended as a requiem. Released 43 years after 'Dune', his 1979 album inspired by Frank Herbert's epic novel of the same name, 'Deus Arrakis' was to be a complementary piece made by a man in his twilight years, a reflection of the work of a much younger musician from across the decades. Ultimately, it serves as a bookend to the remarkable career of the wunderkind of the Berlin School.

It was well documented that the 74-year-old had been unwell, but in the email he sent to me four days before his death, there was no hint that this was the end of the road.

"Good morning! Got up late today," he writes unfussily, before divulging some discomfort. "I have a bad tooth that kept me awake for most of the night, but it has finally gone to sleep, so I can now do this interview at my coffee table in a much better mood."

The musician was housebound because of medical machinery installed in his home, making face-to-face meetings impossible and even video calls difficult – hence the email exchange. Given his predicament, I ask how he was able to work recently with Hans Zimmer. Schulze collaborated with the multi-Oscar-winning composer on a track called 'Grains Of Sand' for Zimmer's soundtrack to the 2021 film version of 'Dune' – a project that would reignite his earlier obsession with the oeuvre of Frank Herbert and lead to further exploration in the shape of 'Deus Arrakis'.

"I am very happy I did not have to travel, otherwise it would have been way too demanding for me," he says. "I cannot travel due to my regular dialysis rhythm. And Hans was also very busy in his own studio. But with a few emails, phone calls and file transfers, it was never a problem."

Schulze exudes good cheer in his written missives, with hints of optimism about the days ahead, making his words seem all the more poignant.

"This year marks my 75th birthday and I will be a happy man celebrating it. All of this is hard work for me. I need to take care of my health and energy, keep my own timing, focus on my music and not talk for hours and hours about myself. That's why I just do selected email interviews now."

He tells me not to take it personally, so I ask what comes next.

"I'll let you know when I know myself," he replies. "I'll make some music, of course, but I have no real plans I can speak of. Wait, no – there are two new promising software synths waiting for me in the studio and a hardware sequencer I am willing to try. Let's see where that takes us…"

Born in Allied-occupied Berlin on 4 August 1947 to a writer father and a ballet dancer mother, Klau Schulze has tended not to give too much away about his personal life over the years, preferring instead to let the music do the talking. Growing up, he learned to play a number of instruments – bass, guitar, drums and keyboard – and went on to study at the University of Berlin, where he specialised in German literature, philosophy and modern classical composition. That was also where Schulze was inculcated in the musical language of Richard Wagner, a fandom he maintained even when it wasn't particularly fashionable. Liking Wagner was especially frowned upon by a milieu of musicians who sought to disassociate themselves from the preferences of the war generation, but Schulze, ever the spirited maverick, followed his own nose.

"I guess that should be a no-brainer," he says. "I have always admired Wagner publicly. He was the biggest inspiration. Pretending or denying things to distance yourself from your parents or your cultural heritage is a common thing when you are of a certain age, but over time one should be able to find out who he is and where he comes from. You can never escape your roots."

PHOTO: PETER WURST

In 1969, Schulze encountered a number of kindred spirits at the Zodiak Club in Berlin, founded by Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Conrad Schnitzler, who also formed Kluster with Dieter Moebius. Roedelius had returned from Paris, where he had witnessed the student uprising in May 1968, and the whiff of revolution was in the air. I wonder what the Zodiak Club was like, given that so many great bands formed there, including Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel, with Schulze playing drums on their groundbreaking debut albums.

"The Zodiak really was a melting pot of young creatives," he recalls. "Not only musicians but artists in general, willing to cross borders and try different things. It's a good example of this unique and innovative atmosphere at that time in West Berlin – a small island separated from the rest of West Germany and a great place to explore and exchange. Which was something you noticed immediately when stepping in. And, of course, I have some treasured memories!"

Given his need to conserve energy, Schulze mainly focuses on questions related to Frank Herbert, 'Dune', his 'Grains Of Sand' track for Zimmer and the two albums recorded 43 years apart.

"As you can see, I did not answer everything via email," he explains. "My working hours are shorter than before, and I don't have to do all of the things I had to do in earlier years, which is a good thing."

I enquire about some of the individuals he met along the way – Schnitzler, Conny Plank, Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser and The Cosmic Jokers – but these questions go unanswered. Likewise, queries about 'Timewind', 'Mirage' and 'Irrlicht' (his solo debut, an ambient watershed that was somehow recorded entirely without synthesisers), receive no replies .

He can't, however, resist answering that age-old question about why he left Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel, each after one album. To leave one legendary band is unfortunate. To leave two seems like carelessness…

"Oh yes, that's an all-time classic FAQ!" he says amiably. "To quote some other proverbs: 'You are the maker of your own happiness', 'Build your own legend', and so on. First of all, I had good times with all the members – I learned a lot, I had fun and I left those bands without any anger. I was just tired of discussing music for hours and making compromises all the time. I wanted to be free to do my own stuff."

In the end, creative differences made him plough his own furrow, and he ponders which other groups at that time would have tolerated his penchant for 30-minute soundscapes with weird time signatures.

"Of course, I played second fiddle in Tangerine Dream because Edgar [Froese] *was* that band," recalls Schulze. "So I founded Ash Ra Tempel with Manuel [Göttsching] and although I left again, Manuel is still a friend of mine and we collaborated together several times afterwards. It was the right decision to strike out on my own. Despite our common roots, Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel and Klaus Schulze all developed differently, which is a good thing."

The 'Dune' album of 1979 wasn't Schulze's first tribute to Frank Herbert. A proto-trance track bearing the sci-fi author's name was released the year before on 'X', which references other influences from Schulze's life, including Friedrich Nietzsche, the Austrian poet Georg Trakl and King Ludwig II, who'd also been the subject of 'Ludwig', a song by Amon Düül II from 1975's 'Made In Germany'. Why was there such interest in the flamboyant, "mad" King of Bavaria?

"He was an interesting and complex person," muses Schulze. "A myth in life and death, a fan of Wagner and a great sponsor of the arts – in a nutshell, someone worth thinking about."

The 'Frank Herbert' track on 'X' only served to whet Schulze's appetite. He'd been reading Herbert since the late 1960s after picking up an English copy of 'Dune', and subsequently devoured the author's galactic fictional universe many times over. The music he started to make captured the space, the shifting sands and the allusions to Sufism five years before the release of the first 'Dune' film.

The 1984 movie, directed by David Lynch and starring Kyle MacLachlan and Sting, was notoriously beset with problems (as was Chilean-French filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky's cancelled attempt in the mid-1970s). Yacht rock supremos Toto were drafted in for the soundtrack, although they never got the call from Zimmer.

"When I did the 'Dune' album, I had no pictures in front of me other than those in my mind," says Schulze. "I was unexpectedly drawn in by the vastness of the 'Dune' universe, the beauty of the barren and silent deserts in particular. I could see, feel and even hear that world."

Schulze also heard the voice of Arthur Brown, of The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown fame, and promptly sent a telegram asking to work with him. Having just returned from Africa, where he'd inadvertently become director of the Burundi National Orchestra, Brown jumped at the chance to collaborate with the forward-thinking German musician. His glossolalia can be heard on 'Shadows Of Ignorance', which takes up side two of 'Dune', and he even accompanied Schulze on tour.

"To be honest, I was surprised when he came over to my studio and did the concerts," says Schulze. "Working with him was not only great fun, it was also a good musical fit – which was something we both could not have predicted, but we were curious and adventurous guys."

Touring across Europe, Brown improvised out front as Schulze hid astride his synthesisers in a hall of mirrors. Apparently, Schulze wasn't a great communicator on that tour. Did he get into character before a performance, rather like a method actor?

"I have fond memories of the tour," he says, indicating laughter. "And yes, I was not only focused but also very nervous – if not nearly panicking – before live concerts. So maybe I didn't talk too much all the time, but I have never been a method actor. I never could prepare myself for a concert. It has always been just a performance of the moment.

"I must say, touring with Arthur sometimes was a true challenge for my nerves. One day he nearly missed his performance because he had 'this incredibly delicious chicken' in a restaurant! But I loved to tour and work with him, and it was a pleasure to record 'Dune' together."

Schulze performed with Brown again, and with The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown keyboard player Vincent Crane, on 1979's 'Time Actor' album, under the alias Richard Wahnfried (the surname being a reference to the dedicated Bayreuth villa – financed by one King Ludwig II – where Wagner's compositions were exclusively performed). He would bring other artists into the Wahnfried fold later and work alone under the alias, too.

"Richard Wahnfried – ah yes, somehow it's Wagner again – was just a pseudonym or an alter ego to make it easier for me and my fans to try different things," explains Schulze. "With time, Wahnfried became more and more of a project name. Later, it was the wish of the record label to add Klaus Schulze on the Wahnfried covers."

So does Schulze prefer working alone?

"You got me there," he says. "Yes, I prefer to work on my own initiative. Sometimes I pause for weeks or even months, then I may have a feverous phase of playing day and night. Who would want to adjust to that? Since I left Tangerine Dream, that has been my favourite way of working. I have musicians come over and record, and an assistant is OK for the studio, but I do it all in my own time."

Two artists Schulze partnered with for more than a decade were Pete Namlook and Bill Laswell, on the amusingly titled 'The Dark Side Of The Moog' series. Made between 1994 and 2008, it ran to 11 volumes. What kept bringing him back?

"That series was pure fun to do," he says. "We were exchanging recordings, sending tapes to and fro, wondering whatwill arrive next, listening without prejudice, adding more things to it and sending it back. That was the first time I learned to love that decentralised way of working."

And then there was Hans Zimmer. Schulze was introduced to the film composer by Dead Can Dance's Lisa Gerrard, who performed with Schulze extensively in the late 2000s.

"It was a big surprise that Hans wanted to work with me," he says. "And I was even more surprised when I heard his friendly German greeting on the phone. He is a very nice and respectful guy, and we introduced ourselves as mutual fans."

Schulze had already been re-reading the 'Dune' book series and had watched David Lynch's 1984 movie again. Collectively, they reignited a passion that had subsided some four decades earlier.

"They triggered something in me," Schulze says. "I felt in that mood again. I was curious what another musical 'Dune' journey would look like. I had no plans. I just listened to the chords fly by… the way I always work. One thing leads to another. I took my time – I don't rush things anymore – but in the end it became clear with 'Deus Arrakis' that I had done my own continuation of 'Dune' without having seen anything from Denis Villeneuve at that time. But the Frank Herbert novels were the key trigger – again. So yes, I hadn't planned it, but it became a kind of sequel, at least for me."

Schulze says he was delighted to hear 'Grains Of Sand' over the film credits for 'Dune', and while director Denis Villeneuve's take doesn'texactly correspond with the version in his own mind's-eye, he was suitably impressed with the movie overall.

Of course, it's academic now, but when I sent my questions to Schulze I asked him if he might consider bringing out yet more 'Dune' soundtracks, perhaps inspired by other books in the series.

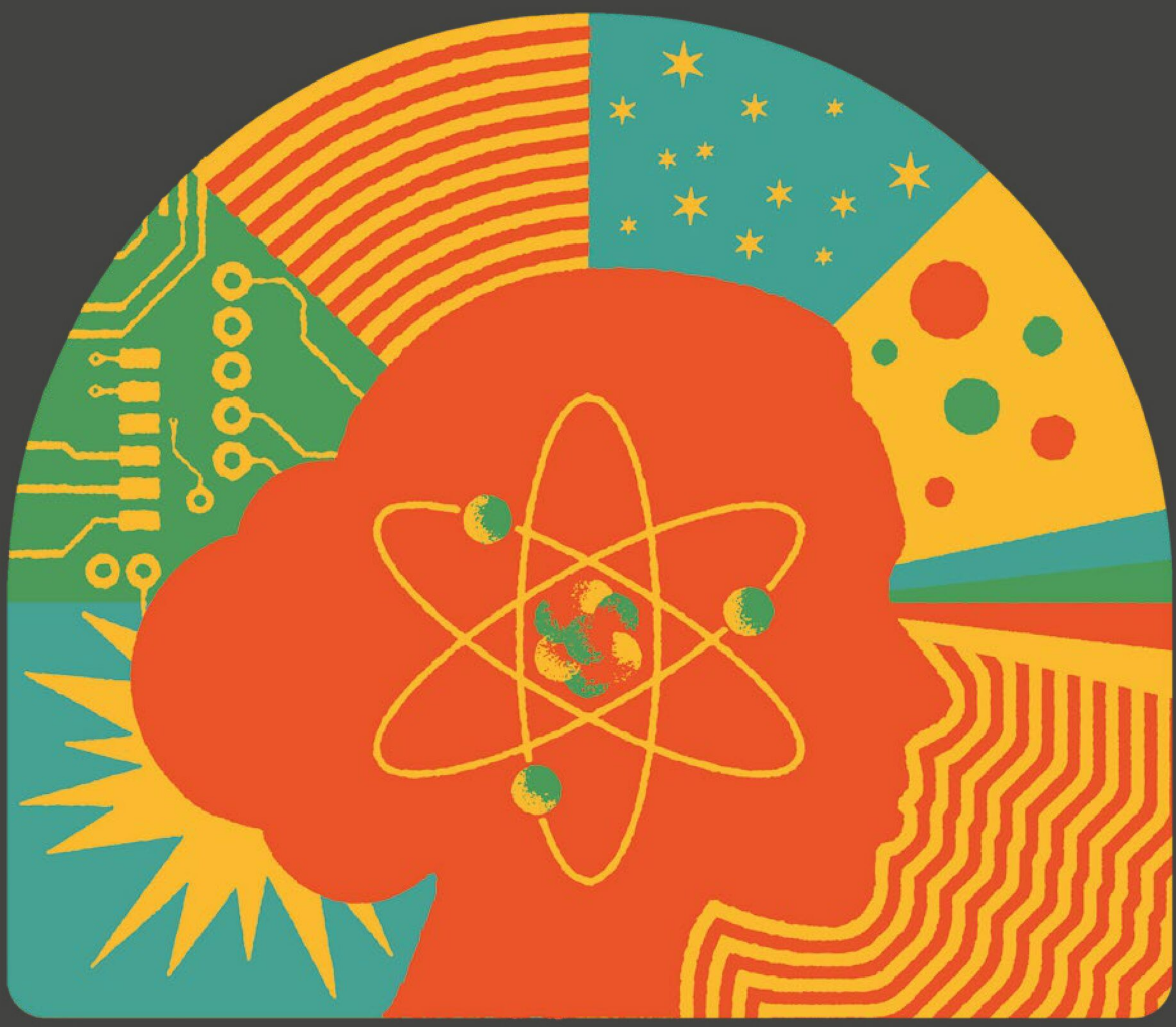
"That would surprise even me," he says. "It's not my plan to do that. But life has a way of surprising us all. Maybe I'll get another crazy call. Who knows? If you had told me the story of 'Deus Arrakis' before, I would have laughed and certainly not taken it seriously. So one thing is for sure – nothing is for sure."

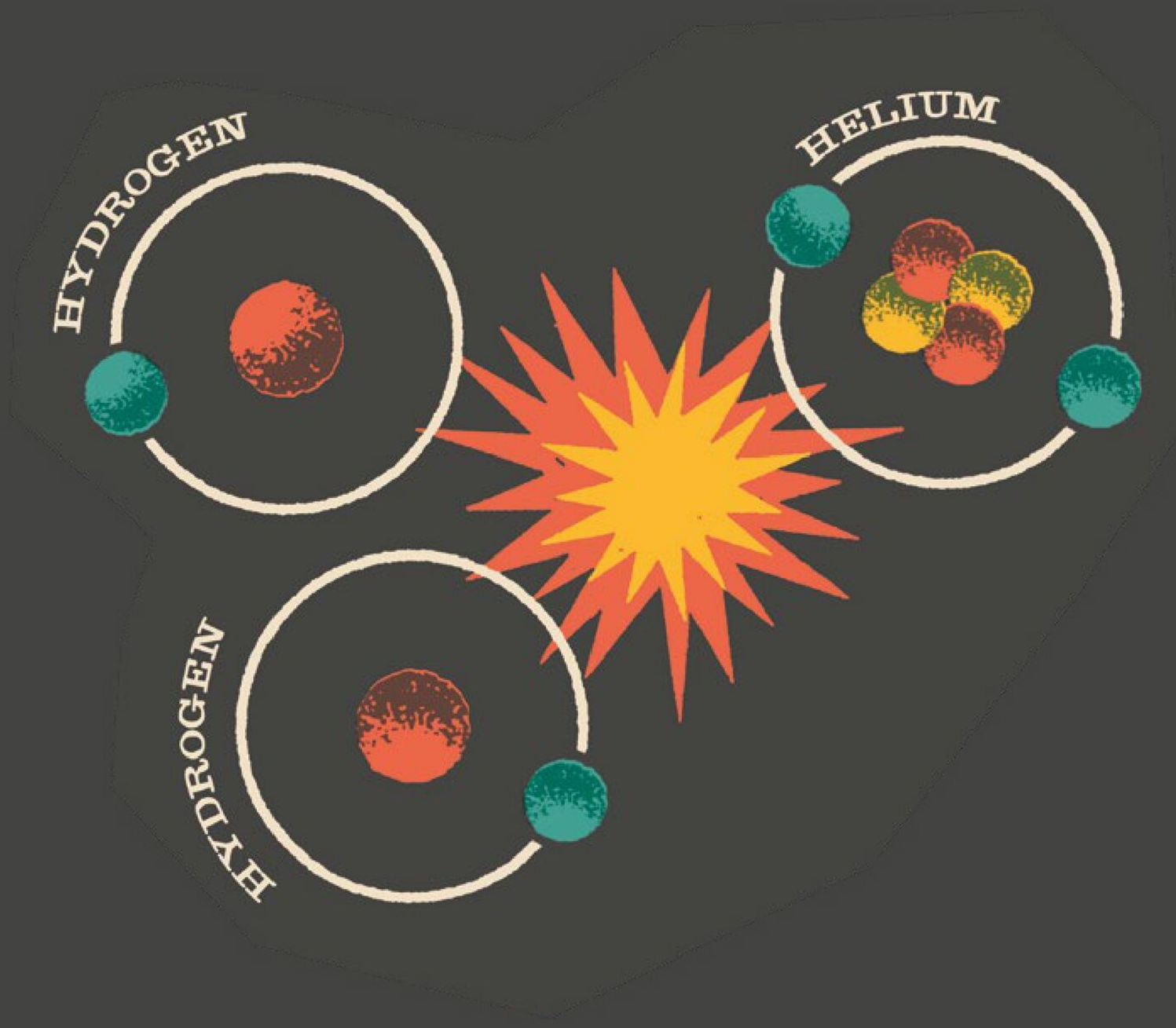
'Deus Arrakis' is released by SPV on 1 July

NEW SCIENTISTS

Take I Monster's electronic veteran Dean Honer, gradually introduce soulful folkie Kevin Pearce, and heat gently over a Bunsen burner. The result? The Sound Of Science – a successful bonding and a new album of scientific delights

WORDS: BOB FISCHER
ILLUSTRATIONS: NICK TAYLOR
PICTURES: CAMILLE BOKHOBZA





"When I first started thinking about this album, my boys were eight or nine years old," says Dean Honer, his beard bristling in the late afternoon Sheffield sunshine. "And watching kids' TV with them was torture. Every other song seemed to be 'The Wheels On The Bus Go Round And Round'. Whereas I don't think it was like that in the 1970s. Things like the 'Play Away' records were quite charming and considered.

"But I'm not sure how I started thinking about a science album for kids – whether it was specifically to do with bad kids' music or more to do with the whole anti-science movement that was emerging. I remember thinking, 'Actually, science is really important in general education', and I just started pulling it all together. At the time, I didn't know if anyone else had ever made one. Now, I think someone *has*, actually… but I haven't heard it."

"It was an American band," adds Kevin Pearce, pacing around his kitchen table. They each furrow their brows in adjacent windows with impressive synchronicity, trying to remember the name of the mystery combo. Could it be They Might Be Giants? They've made a few kids' albums over the years.

"Yeah, that's them!" exclaims Pearce. "I haven't heard it either."

"Anyway, that was the idea," smiles Honer. "Trying to give parents something to listen to with their kids, and hoping they both might enjoy it."

The Sound Of Science make a curious combo. Multitasking electro-powerhouse Dean Honer – Top 10 chart star with The All Seeing I, one half of poptastic Sheffield duo I Monster, one-time Britney Spears producer. And tousle-haired Essex folkie, Kevin Pearce – Radio 2 favourite, endorsed by "Whispering" Bob Harris, compared to Cat Stevens and Richie Havens.

And yet it's somehow unsurprising that from this collision of musical backgrounds comes 'The Sound Of Science'. The records they adore, those 1970s BBC albums with Big Ted and Johnny Ball on their covers, made a virtue of fusing rustic charm with radiophonic oddness.

Their own album follows in this proud tradition. Pearce's finger-picking chords have been squeezed through Honer's electronic mangle ("Heeeeeave!") to produce a dozen shiny synth nuggets. The 'Earth Side' has songs about photosynthesis and the water cycle. The 'Space Side' covers gravity and black holes. It's great.

"I was born in 1965, so I went to school from 1970 onwards," remembers Honer. "They'd bring in the big telly and show you educational programmes and most of them seemed to have Radiophonic Workshop soundtracks. At the time, I wasn't thinking, 'What's this wacky music?', but it just becomes part of you."

So what about the youthful Kevin? Unless he's chanced upon the folk world's most effective skincare regime, his childhood was surely more about Mr Blobby than Mr Benn.

"I've always been interested in all music," he explains. "It can be one man and a guitar, it can be three people on synthesisers or it can be an orchestra. And I've learned a lot from Dean. He'll say, 'Go and have a listen to Bruce Haack'."

And their own scientific backgrounds? Were they both bespectacled school spoffs, jotting down the result of covalent-bonding experiments in their notebooks?

"I was quite disinterested at school," admits Pearce. "Not primary school. That was exciting. I learnt about dinosaurs. But secondary school… I didn't relate to the whole atmosphere, except for one teacher – Mr Lewis. He was my physics teacher and he was amazing. He'd show us a great video about volcanoes, then he'd say, 'Right, you've enjoyed that – now do me a favour and answer some questions from the textbook'. So it was a good trade-off. I remember thinking I'd really like to go and see a live volcano. I still never have."

"I wasn't scientifically academic – I was more into English," recalls Honer. "But I enjoyed it. The Bunsen burners on the tables and the rubber hoses going into the desks. And now I've got a proper telescope in the garden! I'd always wanted one. It's massive – it's got an eight-inch mirror and stands about five feet tall. I just like sitting out there, having a smoke and scanning the skies for interesting stuff. The moon and the planets. Stars get a bit boring, although globular clusters can be really good."

Despite the current 200-mile commute, they are both Essex lads at heart.

"I was born and brought up in east London until I was six, in a tiny maisonette in Canning Town," says Honer. "But then Newham Council built houses in Essex, so we ended up moving to Stanford-le-Hope. As a teenager, I started going out to clubs like Croc's in Rayleigh, which had a real underground electronic scene. I used to see loads of great bands there every week."

Essex? Circa 1981? Let's take a wild stab at Depeche Mode.

"Yeah, they had a residency. At school, I was the singer in this little punk band called Energy, playing youth clubs," Honer continues. "Then we went to see Depeche Mode and Blancmange, and it was, 'Oh wow – this sounds amazing. There's no drummer!'. Doing gigs was such a hassle because you had to carry the fucking drum kit everywhere. So we split the band up, and two of us bought synths and a Dr Rhythm drum machine. We never actually released anything, but we recorded onto a cassette player, just experimenting.

"Then I met a girl on holiday in Spain and moved to London with her. Her brother, Russell Senior, was in Pulp, so we were also visiting him in Sheffield. And we started to think, 'What are we doing in London, doing shitty jobs and having no money? Sheffield's so much better.' So we moved here when I was 19 and it was amazing. This was about 1983. I set up a little studio, went to university, and I'm still here."

Pearce, meanwhile, has been open about the transforming effect of music on a Colchester childhood marred by shyness.

"I'm not a naturally loud or confident person," he says. "But when I play gigs, I put a hat on. Create a character. And that gives you the freedom to do or say whatever you want. Then literally when you walk offstage you're back to who you are. I've found it a good skill in life. When I go into situations I'm dreading, I just think, 'Put your performing hat on for a bit and you'll be able to cope'. And then I go home and hyperventilate."

Their first collaboration came in 2010, under the guise of Skywatchers. With I Monster comrade-in-arms Jarrod Gosling completing the trio, they produced 'The Skywatchers Handbook', an immaculate synthesis of folk and electronica. To steal some deliciously purple prose from the PR blurb: "It begins in a field of lonely Victorian flowers. Electronic and scientific pulses cross-pollinate with the vibrations of bucolic wooden instruments. The old and the new. The wood and the alloy."

"I was starting to take music a bit more seriously and my manager at the time used to manage All Seeing I," recalls Pearce. "So we started out with Dean remixing my track 'Dead Flowers For Her', and that became a Skywatchers song. And we went from there."

"Skywatchers is actually an important part of the genesis of 'The Sound Of Science'," adds Dean. "That album had quite a bit of science in it, but it wasn't aimed at children. And with the 'The Sound Of Science', the original idea was to make it quite retro – going back to the folkiness of 'Play Away' – so most of the songs started with Kevin's guitar chords. Then gradually, as I produced it up, it became more electronic."

KEVIN PEARCE

DEAN HONER

It's covalent bonding in musical form, isn't it? As you said, the wood and the alloy. Pearce nods.

"Yeah. I come from a real rootsy background, playing in folk clubs to people with big beards and knitted jumpers. But it all marries up so well."

So how well do they really know each other? Let's turn this into 'Mr And Mrs'... I ask Pearce to tell me something about Honer.

"Ooh, he keeps his cards very close to his chest. But he's a bit of a fine-whisky connoisseur. He's got quite a knowledge. Occasionally, if I'm staying, he'll bring them all out and we'll both have a little one."

Flipping the game round, I ask Honer to reveal something about Pearce.

"He's a very keen golfer. Despite once having a heart attack on the course."

What the fuck? How have I missed this?

"It was 19 April 2018," nods Kevin earnestly. "Completely out of the blue. I started getting pains down one arm. I plodded on for a few minutes, but then it spread to my chest and neck. It's a weird pain. Like someone is pulling your chest out through your back. I sat down and tried to get my breath and it subsided. But then it came back, five times stronger. I went over, and that was it. The next thing I remember is being in an ambulance on my way to hospital.

"They said they would keep me in overnight, but 10 days later I was still there. An MRI scan found scarring of the heart muscle, which pretty much confirmed I'd had a heart attack. I was only in my early 30s at the time, and it was most likely caused by a blood clot. It was terrifying, but as it went on I got quite geeky about researching it all. They decided to monitor me, so for the last three years I've had a thing the size of a USB chip inserted at the top of my ribcage."

"Yeah, he's like the Six Million Dollar Man now," chuckles Honer. "He's got this chip in his chest that sends data out."

"I'm a cyborg," laughs Pearce. "And it seems, at the moment, that my heart is functioning OK."

So has it changed him? He pauses thoughtfully.

"It's like there's life before it, then life after it. I don't really remember the 'me' from before. I'm much more positive now. Much healthier, too – I've lost five stone since it happened."

I recall Wilko Johnson saying that on the day he got his cancer diagnosis, the flowers outside the clinic were suddenly the brightest, most colourful he had ever seen.

"That's such a good way to put it. I'm like that with trees. I get this stupid, overwhelming happiness from trees. And it's made me love music more than ever. But I've also taken a lot of pressure off myself. When I was younger, it was 'I want success!' But now I'm much more enjoying just picking up the guitar and playing.

"And I wouldn't change it. Everyone says it's great that I recovered, but I feel more like I *un*-covered. I uncovered part of myself I didn't know was there. A much more positive and humble person. The sun shines a lot brighter now than it did before. Although that's probably because of global warming."

Which brings us neatly back to 'The Sound Of Science'. There's even a track called 'Global Warming', proving that – for all the inspiration it takes from Big Ted and Johnny Ball's 1970s exploits – this is very much an album about contemporary concerns. And it was a 2018 intervention from the academic world that provided the impetus to complete the project.

"We got an offer from the University of Sheffield to take part in their Festival Of The Mind, where they link up academics and artists," recalls Honer. "So they asked me if I had anything, and 'The Sound Of Science' was almost fully formed. We put a four-piece band together to play the songs and we had Professor Duncan Cameron and Dr Nate Adams doing bits in between each song. So we'd play 'Everything's Made Of Atoms' and they'd bring out some equipment and do an experiment for the kids in the audience."

"There was a little explosion!" smiles Pearce. The pair of them are suddenly incredibly animated. "You know the little plastic balls from kids' ball pools? Nate blew loads of those out of a canister."

"And they had a glass tube with a speaker at one end," adds Honer. "They'd send a sine wave down it and the flames would form into the shape of the wave. A Flame Organ, they called it."

They're back to being kids again, beaming with undisguised glee. Mr Lewis would be proud. The finished album maintains this youthful zest. Where else could you find the Verve Children's Choir of Sheffield on backing vocals for Add N To (X)'s Steven Claydon? And closing track 'A Total Solar Eclipse' boasts heartwarming narration from eight-year-old twins Henry and Ellis Goddard.

So is there scope for a second volume? After all, they're busy men. Honer, as we speak, is planning a reissue of 'Frogman', a dystopian spoken word project with contributions from both Russell Senior and the Ellis twins' Dad, Will – aka post-punk experimentalist Supreme Vagabond Craftsman. Pearce, meanwhile, is basking in the success of another offshoot project – a soulful new album recorded under his Sun Cutter moniker has reached the German Top 20.

"My best mate keeps texting 'Hasselhoff' to me," he smiles wryly. "But yes, we've spoken about 'The Sound Of Science' Volume 2."

Keep your exercise books handy, class. It seems this particular experiment has yet to reach its conclusion.

'The Sound Of Science' is out now on Castles In Space

MAY THE NORTH BE WITH YOU

Reunited with producer Stephen Hague, Dubstar are back with a cracking album of “full-spectrum megapop” and “acutely observed kitchen-sink dramas”. Normal service resumes, then...

WORDS: MALCOLM JACK

It’s a Wednesday night in July 1997 and Dubstar are in front of a large studio audience on the set of ‘The National Lottery Live’ at BBC Television Centre in London, hungover or drunk – probably both, but they can’t quite remember. While they’re waiting for a camera to swoop over their heads to film the show’s opening sequence, host Carol Smillie turns to singer Sarah Blackwood and attempts to lighten the mood a little.

“She was extraordinarily gorgeous – just stunning,” Blackwood recalls. “She was smiling. And she said to us, ‘Smile and kiss your credibility goodbye’.”

“We were waving, but apparently not smiling,” multi-instrumentalist Chris Wilkie recalls, taking up the story in his broad Geordie lilt. “Then this producer comes out from behind and he’s full of hell. He looked like he was going to really kick our arses. He goes, ‘This a prime-time show – you’re meant to look happy to be here!’.”

If, like Dubstar, fast-rising, indie-dance trio of the Britpop era, that producer had appeared on every possible prime-time TV show – including ‘Top Of The Pops’, ‘The O-Zone’, ‘TFI Friday’, ‘GMTV’ (where Mr Motivator told Wilkie off for smoking) and ‘This Morning’ with Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan (twice, including one time when Judy tried complimenting Dubstar by suggesting their music sounded like Oasis) – perhaps he too might have struggled to summon a consummately professional Carol Smillie-esque pearly white grin. Not to mention they’d been pissed solid for the previous two years, playing a nightly lottery with the bottle.

In their own, unsmiling, bullshit-resistant northern English way, were Dubstar happy to be “there”? Rubbing shoulders with the great and the good of 1990s celebrity culture, necking free booze practically every night at parties around London, thrown to celebrate even the faintest triumphs of their Britpop peers? Touring relentlessly, promoting their records to massive TV audiences, propelling the band to eight UK Top 40 hits and the best part of a million record sales? Yes and no – it’s complicated.

But Blackwood and Wilkie are definitely happy to be here now. Still friends, still making music that’s as good as anything they’ve done before on their self-released fifth album, ‘Two’. And, most importantly, still alive.

When Blackwood was a kid growing up in Halifax, West Yorkshire, she used to stick the same thing on top of her Christmas list time and again.

"A record deal from EMI," she says.

By a fateful twist, her boyfriend accidentally left a cassette tape of her singing on the lounge table at Steve Hillier's flat in Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1993. Santa had nothing to do with it, but as a result, the 22-year-old interior design student ended up getting what she'd wished for far sooner than she could have imagined. That's when both the dream and Blackwood's nightmare began.

Back then, nightclub DJ Hillier was playing around Newcastle with Wilkie in a 4AD and Creation Records-inspired two-piece band called The Joans. Dazzled by Blackwood's understated and lovely voice, with its unaffected flicker of a West Yorkshire accent, they invited her to join the group early in 1994, taking over vocals from Hillier, who was then free to focus on guitar, keys and programming.

Not long afterwards, the trio renamed themselves Dubstar. Some early demos – infusing Cocteaus-ish dreampop textures with hip hop beats and melancholic synth lines and lyrics – soon found their way onto the stereo of the late and much loved former Sounds journalist, Andy Ross. Nine months after the band formed, Dubstar promptly signed to Food, the London label run by Ross and Dave Balfe. Just in time for the feast.

A freshly acquired subsidiary of EMI, Food had hit paydirt in April 1994 with the release of Blur's multimillion-selling third album, 'Parklife'. However – fun fact alert – Dubstar technically gave the label its first chart-topping single in July 1995, with their instantly evocative debut 'Stars', weeks before the release of Blur's 'Country House' and all the unbridled mania surrounding it. A kind of double-helix meeting point between acid house's great comedown and a Britpop scene very much on the up.

"We had the first Number One for Food Records, don't forget it," Wilkie says with a mixture of pride and jest. "It was in Israel, mind you, but Andy was ecstatic with that because it came just before Blur's imperial phase."

There was a party to mark the achievement, of course, because back then there was always a party. The Food Records family – and it really did come to feel like a family for Dubstar – were good at making sure all their artists' triumphs were celebrated, however relatively minor they may have been in the grand firmament of musical stardom.

"There was always something to celebrate," Wilkie says. "Blur were quite clearly massively successful. But Food made sure there was a party because, you know, somebody had been on 'Top Of The Pops' or reached Number One in Japan."

If it wasn't a Food Records party that Dubstar were drinking at, then it was somebody else's, because partying was the toxic lifeblood of Britpop.

"Back then, every time there was a new single out for any band, there'd be a free bar somewhere in town," Wilkie remembers. "You could plan your entire week's diary around where you could go in London without having to put your hand in your pocket once and be hammered every night. That's what sustained the industry, you know? It's where the stories came from before they ended up in the NME."

The parties came thicker and faster as Dubstar's successes rapidly grew and grew. Their 1995 debut album, 'Disgraceful', was produced by American Stephen Hague, best known for his work on Pet Shop Boys' 'Please' and New Order's 'Republic'. It went platinum in the UK, boosted by its second hit single, 'Not So Manic Now' (a cover of a song by the ultra-obscure Brick Supply, self-hailed as "Wakefield's laziest band"). When 'Stars' was re-released in March 1996 it gave Dubstar their highest-ever charting single at Number 15.

Their second album, 1997's 'Goodbye', kept the momentum going by scaling the Top 20. But by this point, all the drinking had begun to tip over into a much darker place. The hedonistic culture of the age had become a convenient veil for Blackwood's deep feelings of inadequacy – about her looks, her voice and her songs.

"I was expected to behave badly," she says. "So I kind of thought, 'OK, it's alright to chuck my lack of confidence and my imposter syndrome into alcohol. It's fine'."

None of this was helped by the savagely provocative media of the time, which obsessed over the appearance of female Britpop musicians yet struggled to grant them the creative kudos their male counterparts were earning with undue ease. An absolute low point came when Dubstar were getting out of the car one day to do a TV appearance and a journalist from The Sun was waiting to pounce.

"He cornered me," Blackwood sighs. "And he said, 'The reason your band aren't more successful is because you're not pretty enough'. And that absolutely just… well, I was devastated. Horrible."

Blackwood would often drink until she passed out. Wilkie, struggling with mental health problems and no stranger to excessive boozing himself, was unable to confront his own demons because he was often too busy worrying about Blackwood, who as well as being his bandmate was also his flatmate.

"The hardest thing about Sarah when she was having her problems with alcohol was just protecting her from predatory blokes," he confides. "It's sad to say, but people see a woman who's inebriated as a soft target. So I turned into a sort of minder for a while."

Wilkie reveals affectionally that Blackwood in her natural, sober state is "an extremely self-deprecating, quiet, shrinking violet of a person".

"But by the second or third glass, she'd be standing on the table shouting at people," he continues. "She'd be cursing at Brett Anderson."

"I don't remember that!" Blackwood laughs.

Brett Anderson probably doesn't either, I reassure her.

"There was always a scene which needed to be taken care of," Wilkie says. "But it was difficult to be there 100 percent of the time."

"Chris tried his very best and so did Andy, who was like a father figure… oh, I'm gonna cry," Blackwood adds, her voice quivering, throwing a hand over her mouth as tears prick her eyes. Ross died in January of this year at the age of 66 from complications following treatment for cancer. His loss is still very raw for all who knew him.

Amid the cut-throat business deals and rampant excesses of the 90s music industry – which tied lots of bands into terrible record deals, leaving them deeply in debt – Ross fought hard for fair deals for all his artists. Dubstar never got rich but they did OK.

"We were fortunate that we were surrounded by some good people," Wilkie reflects, intervening while Blackwood is overcome with emotion. "We had Andy Ross and Food. They acted as a buffer between us and the mothership of EMI, which was obviously an all-consuming monolithic corporation. So we weren't eaten alive. Instead, we kind of ate ourselves alive. We went to pieces at times."

Dubstar never actually broke up. They just sort of faded away following the release of their third album, 2000's non-charting 'Make It Better'. Hillier quit the band shortly before the album's release and isn't involved with the revived Dubstar of today.

"Steve decided he didn't want to do it anymore," Wilkie says. "But we had just started promoting an album. So what he was really saying was that he couldn't be arsed to promote the record. We wanted to keep going, but Sarah and I were burned out as human beings. We were really exhausted. I had mental health problems I was starting to get treatment for. Sarah's talked about her ways of dealing with her stress. We just didn't have the will to continue."

Instead, they each started pursuing other musical endeavours. Wilkie worked with Mark Owen – yes, the "cute" one from Take That – during his post-boyband indie cosplay period, playing guitar on Owen's second solo album, 2003's 'In Your Own Time'.

Blackwood, meanwhile, joined Creation Records' synthpop group Technique in 2002, replacing Xan Tyler as singer ahead of a European tour with Depeche Mode. Out of the frying pan and into the fire, she suddenly found herself flying around on private jets and performing in arenas with one of the world's biggest bands.

"That was a-m-a-a-a-a-zing," she enthuses.

Afterwards, Blackwood and Technique's Kate Holmes decided to start writing together. They formed a new group, electroclash provocateurs Client, and swiftly inked a record deal with Mute imprint Toast Hawaii, owned by Depeche Mode's Andy Fletcher.

Dressed in latex outfits – part airline hostess, part fetish model – the duo toured extensively, generating a cult following and working with various rock 'n' roll luminaries, from Carl Barât and (separately) Pete Doherty of The Libertines to Depeche's Martin Gore, Tim Burgess of The Charlatans and Douglas McCarthy of Nitzer Ebb. Tour-bus life with Client brought some, shall we say, refreshing changes from the Dubstar days.

"Being the only girl on a tour bus of men is pretty hard," Blackwood admits. "It sounds a bit crude but you'd get balls in the face before you'd even had your coffee in the morning. With Client, it was different."

But little had changed in the way of Blackwood's drinking problem, which was still running out of control. It took an intervention from, of all people, the hardly saintly Barât – who toured with Client to DJ and fleetingly jumped about the stage singing his guest vocal on their track 'Pornography' – to finally convince Blackwood to get into rehab, following a particularly self-destructive session in Basel, Switzerland.

"He said, 'Sazzy, I think it's time'," she remembers. "When somebody like him says it, you're like, 'OK, I think it's time'."

That was in 2005 and she's been sober ever since. Not so manic now, Blackwood instead throws much of her time and energy these days into serious exercise (she even worked as a fitness instructor). Wilkie is quietly raising a family back in North-East England. But the pair never lost touch and their friendship never faded. After a lot of false starts working together again over many years, they finally released new music under the Dubstar name in 2018. 'One', produced by Youth, became the band's fourth official album, 18 years after their third.

Thanks to the pandemic, its follow-up, 'Two', took a bit longer than planned to arrive and proved a lot more complicated to put together, with Blackwood and Wilkie working entirely remotely from their homes in different parts of the country. Youth had been on board to produce again but ended up locked down in Spain.

So instead, a happy (albeit mostly online) reunion transpired with Stephen Hague, who they'd remained friendly with since 'Disgraceful' way back in 1994. The trio found they still shared a "telepathic" connection, bouncing ideas back and forth over the internet week after week, until a brand new and yet somehow still timeless iteration of Dubstar's sombre, strident indie-dance emerged from the digital ether.

Amid big, lush, sculpted soundscapes, crisp melodies and bittersweet choruses steeped in sweeping electropop classicism, 'Two' delves into the doldrums of suburban mania and the way that "women are forced to fit themselves to the shape of the world and not vice versa". It represents, Wilkie says, the completion of "unfinished business".

"Sarah and I used to have certain ways of looking at things," he explains. "It hasn't changed drastically at all. I just think that it feels a bit more nuanced, a bit more mature."

Wilkie admits he quite enjoys going on YouTube now and again to revisit some of the glory days in all their weirdness. A lot of it is there, preserved for the ages in rips from wonky VHS videos taped off the telly by fans – from Glastonbury performances to a cringey interview with an extremely Alan Partridge-esque Richard Madeley, and the time Dubstardid Eurotrash, singing 'Poupée De Cire, Poupée De Son' with the late French crooner Sacha Distel. Blackwood was so hungover she could barely remember the words. But she can't and likely won't ever go there, even if she has wondered whether it might be therapeutic.

"I blocked out a lot of stuff," she admits. "I look back and I don't remember things. I *feel* things. And it feels painful. It took me a long time to make peace with the fact I'd ever even been in Dubstar."

Thankfully, the present is a far happier and more rewarding place for Blackwood and Wilkie.

"We're extremely lucky it stopped when it did, because that was at the very apex of our personal problems," Wilkie says. "I think if we'd become more successful, or even carried on being how we were in 1996 through to 2000, we'd probably be dead."

They both laugh, but in a way that suggests they know that they probably shouldn't.

"I don't think we could have carried on making records back then that are as good as the one we've just done now," Wilkie adds. "It's one of those things that had to blow up completely so it could be put back together in a healthy way.

"It took a long time, but Sarah is doing very well now. She's functioning as an artist probably better than she ever did. And I'm in a not bad place myself. We're just making music we like and we're proud of."

It's not exactly the £13,201,260 National Lottery jackpot shared by some lucky souls later that Wednesday night back in July 1997, but in their own resilient and resurgent way, Dubstar's numbers have come up. You might even get a smile out of them yet, Carol.

'Two' is out now on Northern Writes

French trio Zombie Zombie take an unexpected leap of faith on their new album, a “reverberated doom orgy” that fuses Latin and choral arrangements with fizzing analogue synths and vocoders

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN
PICTURES: CAMILLE BOKHOBZA

MONSTER MASH

The Bagnolet studio where Zombie Zombie make their music is a mere 20-minute walk from Paris' most famous cemetery, Père Lachaise, the resting place of a subterranean galaxy of departed luminaries.

"Chopin!" declares Étienne Jaumet from the depths of his musical bunker, and we start to list the many celebrated cadavers buried alongside him – Wilde, Piaf, Géricault, Balzac, Molière, Bizet, Bernhardt, Morrison… the list goes on.

Should there be an undead uprising in the night, Zombie Zombie might not be the first unfortunates to have their brains eaten, but – taking into account stealth trajectory – the flesh-eaters could be groaning at the studio gates by dawn.

Jaumet's chief partner-in-crime, Cosmic Neman, might get lucky and miss the reckoning of fleshy horror – he's late for our interview. While we wait, I suggest Jaumet shows us around the studio. For the last couple of years, journalists have had to deal with the curse of somehow making webcam conversations sound interesting, so artists take note – a live link from the studio is the way to go, especially if you have loads of interesting gear.

What follows over the next five minutes is like an episode of 'Through The Keyhole' with added vintage synth porn. Jaumet demonstrates his old ARP and EMS synths with pride, picking up the odd LinnDrum or 808 as he goes. It could be a museum of analogue equipment, except it's all still very much in use. To assemble such a collection would be nigh-on impossible now, and if one succeeded, it would be eye-wateringly expensive.

"I'm an old musician," says Jaumet with a smile. "So I've had some of it all my life and never sold it. I bought it all back in the 1990s when it was quite cheap and people didn't really care about this stuff. I never bought anything expensive."

He admits that he managed to acquire the EMS as a result of some serendipitous forgetfulness.

"It's not really mine, but someone left it here, so I'm lucky."

The digital dawn prompted plenty of clear-outs, and there was Jaumet, sourcing all his equipment from the brocantes, boutiques d'occasions and bric-a-bracs. Once unfashionable, that retro-futurist aesthetic is an essential component in the sonic universe of Zombie Zombie, with new ideas built on old-world instruments evoking celluloid images of space travel and sci-fi.

The group's latest release, 'Vae Vobis', is one of the most audacious albums of the year. It's written mostly in Latin and even credits a "Latin muse", Virginie Leroux, in the credits. Inspired by Northern Renaissance philosopher and theologian Erasmus, it's full of Jaumet's synths and polyrhythmic integrity courtesy of two live drummers – Cosmic Neman and Dr Schonberg (aka Jérôme Lorichon).

Then there's the menacing choir, singing "Woe unto you" in Latin, disinterring arcane pagan rituals through three different vocoders to create the unique 'Vae Vobis' sound. And as you might expect, there are no cheap plug-ins or app shortcuts, although they don't use the Sennheiser VSM-201 vocoder ("Very expensive, and very, very fragile") first deployed on every track of 1978's 'Sunlight' by Herbie Hancock. Instead, they mix it up between the trio of a Behringer copy ("I'm not a great fan of Behringer, but this one is good"), a Roland VT-4 and a Korg.

Cosmic Neman arrives and, with my studio tour concluded, I question why so many French musicians, especially of a certain age, enjoy being absorbed in schlocky sci-fi and horror, as per Kavinsky's zombie backstory or Daft Punk's robot schtick.

"All these bands are pretty much the same age and we all grew up watching horror movies," explains Neman. "It was the beginning of a certain freedom when we were teenagers, watching these movies with our friends and listening to the soundtracks, having a beer or a Coke. It really meant something to us."

It's no coincidence that Zombie Zombie take their name from a ZX Spectrum video game which would have been all the rage in 1984.

"I loved my childhood," enthuses Jaumet. "I was a really big fan of music in cartoons and movies."

It's obviously been a natural step for them as adults to mine that same culture. I wonder, what with the new LP being in the language of liturgy, if they also had Catholic guilt to deal with.

"I think it's more of a pagan thing," ventures Neman. "Latin is the Catholic language, for sure, and we know it has been sung very well for centuries."

I tell them how Latin has been weaponised in the UK by the ruling classes – particularly certain politicians – as an ostensible indicator of breeding and intelligence. Perhaps Zombie Zombie are reclaiming it for the (Eucharistic) masses?

"The idea behind the Latin thing was just to have this cryptic language," says Neman. "When I was younger, I remember listening to metal bands who would reverse their vocals so you couldn't understand what they meant. Or like Magma, who invented their own language. I was always really interested in that kind of stuff and also liked the idea of singing in this ancient language – I'm fascinated by this sort of thing in music."

Zombie Zombie assembled their own choir, a core of about five or six singers. Did they each have to learn how to speak in Latin?

"For three or four months, we taught them Latin 12 hours a day," says Neman, with a straight face.

"The real difficulty was choosing how to pronounce it, because it's a dead language," interjects Jaumet. "Do we pronounce it the French way or the German way? We chose the French."

"We worked with an opera singer," continues Neman, speaking about soprano Angèle Chemin, a prize-winner at the prestigious Concours International de Chant Lyrique de Vivonne in 2020. "She was used to singing in Latin, so she informed us of the different possibilities."

'Vae Vobis' is the first time Zombie Zombie have really explored lyrics in their music, as neither Jaumet nor Neman consider themselves to be songwriters in the traditional sense. In for a penny, as they say.

"After 15 years of the band, you're like, 'OK, we might need to change something so that we aren't just doing the same Zombie Zombie record," says Neman. "That was the idea, to try to do something different."

That something else is manifested in 'Nusquam Et Ubique', a Giallo film-style disco banger that takes orbit when the sequencer kicks in, and 'Dissolutum', the catchiest song you're ever likely to hear – it sounds like a visit from a zombie Jacob Rees-Mogg, leaving a calling card requesting a convocation with your olfactory bulb.

One song that doesn't get the Latin treatment is 'War Is Coming'. Arriving during the second half and sung in English, the stark message is effective in its simplicity and feels chillingly prophetic, especially after Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine, something the band couldn't have envisaged when making the record.

"Well, you know, there have always been wars," points out Neman. "So it was an easy guess."

Zombie Zombie formed around 15 years ago. At the time, Jaumet was saxophonist for the underrated French alt-pop trio The Married Monk and, more pertinently, he was the soundman for Swedish-French indie rock outfit Herman Dune, who Neman was drumming for. (Neman also goes by the sobriquet Neman Herman Dune, a remnant from those days.)

Jaumet and Neman started jamming in a studio just for fun. Friends who witnessed some of their early sessions suggested they should consider doing something in a more official band-like capacity.

"Then we played one show," says Neman. "And some people were like, 'Maybe you should do a record'. I would never have thought that we would still be playing together."

Doc Schonberg, also known as Lori Sean Berg, joined the band around 10 years ago. Where did he come from?

"Another planet," says Neman, laughing. "He's a lunatic but we love him."

Playing in the same scene as Zombie Zombie in bands like The Berg Sans Nipple, Schonberg went on tour with Herman Dune and the three men struck up a great friendship.

"He's a really good fellow and he can play anything," says Neman. "We did an album with two drum kits and I recorded everything, but we needed two drummers to play it live, so we asked him to come on board and that's how he joined the band."

Before Schonberg joined, Zombie Zombie staked out their territory with an extended EP in 2006 and their impressive 2008 full debut, 'A Land For Renegades', an album that takes in the widescreen splendour of Ennio Morricone set against a krautrock backdrop of propulsive grooves and savvy synths. The title track in particular could be Morricone and John Carpenter in proverbial flagrante delicto. Then there's 'Texas Rangers', apparently inspired by Peter Watkins' movie 'Punishment Park', which takes off in an enjoyably peculiar left-field direction. Do the samples at the beginning of the track come from the film?

"It's my voice," says Neman.

"We don't use samples," states Jaumet.

"Just fake samples," adds Neman.

So why are Zombie Zombie allergic to samples?

"We're not allergic – it's just not our way," explains Neman. "We've never had samplers. We're musicians first. I'm not saying people using samples are not musicians, but Étienne was a sax player and I was playing drums, so we come from a tradition of playing our instruments."

"It's why there are mistakes everywhere when we play," laughs Jaumet.

"Fuck-ups are great," adds Neman. "People don't really do them anymore."

In 2010, the band followed up 'A Land For Renegades' with an EP called 'Zombie Zombie Plays John Carpenter', featuring respectful covers of the legendary American auteur's greatest musical moments, including 'The Bank Robbery' from 'Escape From New York', plus the themes from 'Escape From LA', 'Assault On Precinct 13', 'Halloween' and 'The Thing'.

"We had no real plan to cover these songs," says Jaumet. "After our first album came out, someone in Glasgow said, 'Your music reminds me of John Carpenter. You should do some covers'."

The World Of Film International Festival, or WOFF, invited Zombie Zombie to Glasgow to perform some of Carpenter's scores. They accepted and the EP followed.

"We had a lot of the same equipment – maybe not *exactly* the same," says Neman. "And the power of John Carpenter's music is that it's very efficient, very simple. You'll have just a bassline and a melody, with maybe a drum machine. This turned out to be a revolution in soundtrack music history – it's not Ennio Morricone using a massive orchestra. Carpenter was one of the first to do this really efficient music. And they're real bangers, too. They sound like hits, like The Supremes or something!"

The trio have ventured into the world of film scoring themselves, particularly with French director Sébastien Marnier, who commissioned them to write music for his feature films 'Faultless' ('Irréprochable', 2016), and 'School's Out' ('L'Heure De La Sortie', 2018).

"Well, actually, he's just made a new movie, but he wanted classical music this time, so he didn't end up working with us," says Neman, sounding disappointed. "It's a bit of a shame because we made the music for his first two movies. That would have been great to do the first three as a trilogy or something. There's talk of a TV series, so he might hire us for that again. We'll see. We've been lucky in working with him."

Before we wrap up the interview, I want to ask them about the Lady Gaga single 'Venus', another unlikely collaboration Zombie Zombie found themselves involved in (although it sounds more like a hostile takeover).

In 2012, Lady Gaga's management company approached them in pursuit of their single, 'Rocket Number 9', which just so happens to be a Sun Ra cover.

First things first, though… were they out of their minds trying to interpret Herman "Sonny" Blount, certified space cadet, founder of Afrofuturism and sonic alien from Saturn by way of Birmingham, Alabama?

"I'm a saxophonist, but I don't feel like a jazz player," asserts Jaumet. "But in some ways, there is something direct and very simple about Sun Ra, even if it's super-free at the same time. For me, it was logical to do a cover because the theme is strong and uncomplicated, but we just tried not to play jazz. We let our imaginations go. So yeah, it's not as difficult as you might think to cover Sun Ra, because it's very open."

As for Gaga, Neman picks up the story.

"Jean-Baptiste Guillot, the head of our label, contacted us and said, 'Guys, can you come to the office this morning?' So we traipsed in and he played us the song. He's like, 'It's Lady Gaga sampling you, is that okay?'. We had all these exchanges with her label because they didn't know it was a Sun Ra cover – they thought it was by us.

"Eventually, we had to say, 'It's not our song, so you'll have to speak with us *and* with Sun Ra's people'. That was a funny thing. And then even funnier were the comments on YouTube saying things like, 'Zombie Zombie never worked with Lady Gaga – she worked with Sun Ra directly'."

'Venus' limped to Number 76 in the UK singles chart. While Zombie Zombie weren't paid for publishing, they did pick up something for the sample.

"I don't think it really worked," says Neman, shaking his head.

Zombie Zombie might not be "Little Monsters", but you'll be able to witness the big monsters live when they play in the UK in November. And remember, if things go bump in the night and the undead come smashing through the door, remove the head and destroy the brain…

'Vae Vobis' is out now on Born Bad

LIVE WIRES

All shuddering bass, eclectic sonics and playful, avant-punk intensity, ‘Nothing To Declare’ by 700 Bliss – aka DJ Haram and Moor Mother – is a blistering statement of intent, elevating electronic music and hip hop to thrilling new heights

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS
PICTURES: ISHA DIPIKA WALIA

There’s a lot that hits you the first time that you listen to ‘Nothing To Declare’, the debut album from 700 Bliss. The collaborative project of DJ Haram (Zubeyda Muzeyyen) and Moor Mother (Camae Ayewa) seethes with punk energy and raw emotion, powered by lashings of bone-rattling, subsonic bass, Muzeyyen’s expansive distorted beats and Ayewa’s prophetic, razor-sharp vocals. A dizzying and intensely unique take on noise rap that delves boldly into the hitherto unexplored reaches of hip hop, jazz, sound collage and forward-thinking club music, ‘Nothing To Declare’ is one of the most potent long-players you’re likely to hear this year.

Bristling with candid observations and urgent political interrogations, it’s by turns vicious, defiant and triumphant. But amid the dark, the light shines in. Listen carefully, and it’s clear both performers are as playful as they are purposeful in their approach to music-making. To get to the core of 700 Bliss, the clue is in the name, where elation is a vital driving compulsion.

“One of the motivations with the album was conveying this effortless joy and carefree feeling,” says Muzeyyen. “Even though there’s passion and rage, we’re having a lot of fun – and fun was a priority with this project.”

Muzeyyen is at her studio apartment in New York, where she’s lived since 2020. Her cat Ricky clamours for attention on the desk beside her as she describes the band’s essence.

“Moor Mother is my favourite poet, and I’m… I don’t know – a poet who gets mistaken for a stand-up comedian,” she laughs. “We both decided we wanted a name with a number and a word, like Three 6 Mafia, which is so cool. And Bliss stands for ‘bitches living in society’s shit’. It doesn’t formally denote that, but it can. It’s a reference to this punk band who were really popular – they’re friends of ours and were part of the scene back in the day when Camae and I met. They were called Gloss, which stands for ‘girls living outside of society’s shit’. And Camae and I were just, ‘Nah, we’re in the trenches! We are living in this. We’re not living outside of nothing. We are constantly kicking and screaming and rebelling’. And that’s Bliss.”

The two met when they were both living in Philadelphia, which Ayewa describes as having “an amazing DIY music scene and some of the best writers in the world”. They connected at an Afro-futurist event organised by Rasheedah Phillips, an American artist, community activist, author and lawyer who, along with Ayewa, created the literary and artistic collective Black Quantum Futurism.

“We knew of each other and were already friends on Facebook,” says Muzeyyen. “I knew who Moor Mother was, but after seeing her perform I was like, ‘That was so cool!’. And then we became real-life friends.”

Ayewa is a prolific vocalist, poet, musician and activist, having released several acclaimed experimental solo albums as Moor Mother, including her 2016 debut ‘Fetish Bones’ and 2019’s masterful ‘Analog Fluids Of Sonic Black Holes’, as well as collaborating with artists such as hip hop duo Armand Hammer, rapper Pink Siifu and progressive London jazz outfit Sons Of Kemet. She now lives in Los Angeles, where she teaches composition at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music.

When Ayewa pops up on the video call a couple of minutes late, she apologises for needing to duck back out again almost immediately.

“Oh my goodness, I’m very sorry,” she exclaims. “I’m just finishing up a mentoring session with my students, so I’ll chime in a little later. I’m really sweet – we’re really sweet – and it’s not usually like this.”

She laughs. We don’t doubt her.

Muzeyyen and Ayewa began working together in 2014, releasing their celebrated debut EP ‘Spa 700’ in 2018. With tracks like the incendiary ‘Cosmic Slop’, it provided the first evidence of their irrefutable sonic chemistry. ‘Nothing To Declare’ might have followed sooner if not for their busy respective schedules and touring commitments. In fact, arranging this interview proves to be tricky due to their bulging work diaries and time differences.

As a partnership, the pair are an unstoppable force. DJ and producer Muzeyyen's Middle Eastern-inflected electronic soundscapes frequently adopt the rugged rhythms of the club music of New Jersey, where she grew up. As Moor Mother, Ayewa is a lyrical force to be reckoned with, and her tremendous vocal ability, especially at full scream, is frequently described by the music press with words like "terrifying". Yet in conversation both she and Muzeyyen are warm, open and easygoing.

Their cross-country divide and the need to balance different personal projects inevitably impact the 700 Bliss writing process, but as Muzeyyen explains, it has helped her develop confidence as a rapper and lyricist.

"There were three tracks that Camae had to write a second verse for," she reveals. "And eventually, I wrote them because I was like, 'Well, she's been encouraging me to write and perform on our tracks, and she's not around to write a second verse, so I'm going to get these feelings off my chest'. I'm not the kind of person that will be like, 'Just throw yourself in there and you'll be great'. If I throw myself in there, I won't be great, and I know I'll be hella in my head. I've written all my life and never performed vocals. But it flowed out."

"I enjoy the fact we are friends first and we make space for each other to be," affirms Ayewa. "Making music with DJ Haram is really easy and sweet."

The resulting tracks, 'Bless Grips', 'No More Kings' and 'Nothing To Declare', all reveal Muzeyyen as a formidable singer in her own right. Amid the pounding kick drum of the title track, she is the perfect foil for Ayewa's flow, coming out punching with lines such as "You're always about your crisis / Are you a narcissist but righteous" before asserting smoothly, "I've never been a victim". How did having the space to develop as a writer feel?

"The music industry is interesting," she muses. "It works in a way that's totally opposite to the way I work. I feel that being in music, you gotta be ready for the opportunity right now. You don't know, Kanye could hit you up and fly you out to his ranch in Wyoming, and then you're Arca, bitch."

She laughs.

"That's cool, and I want to always be ready to say yes to an opportunity that's bigger than even my dreams, because sometimes it straight-up happens, you know what I mean? But I also really appreciate being able to slowly work my way into something and feel more comfortable."

So what does that kind of success mean – what are your biggest dreams?

"Speaking for myself, I would like to be known for what I do – the music I make and the style of my DJing," says Muzeyyen. "I don't know that many people out there who are on the same wavelength as me, who do what I do. I don't go and make art trying to be the most original or the most unique. I try to challenge myself and make work that feels true.

"I would like to be known as someone who has done a lot and had an impact in this overlap of noise, hip hop, club, experimental electronic music and Middle Eastern feel. Meeting that goal means treating all the projects I've made as part of my life's work."

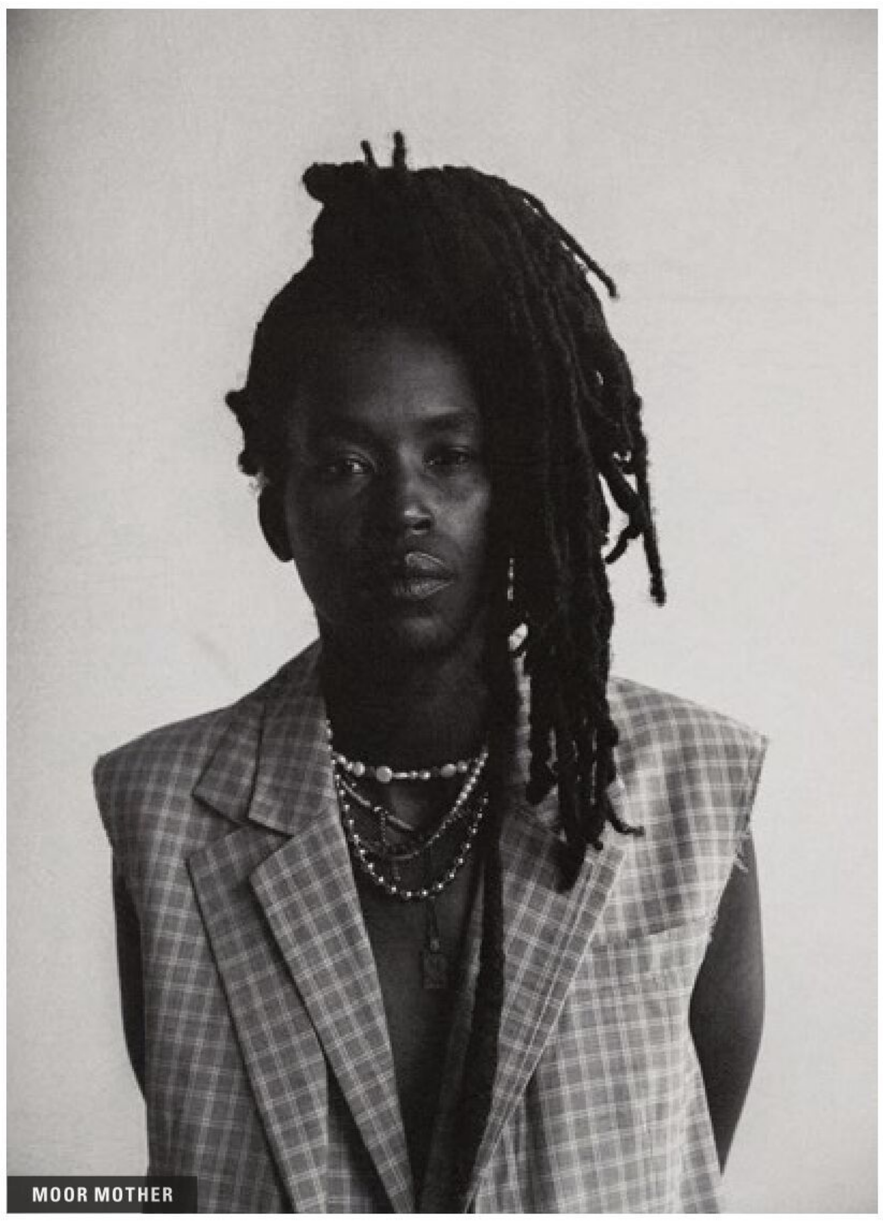
In terms of the influences that have filtered into 'Nothing To Declare', Ayewa cites Wu-Tang Clan and J Dilla's 2006 album 'Donuts' as inspirations. On the "distinctly experimental" rap of 'No More Kings', she rolls out what she describes as one of the lines she's most proud of.

"I feel like bowling green / I feel like TCU / A whole lot of madmen coming after you / Handcuffed to your own mattress / Handcuffed to the world spinning backwards."

On the irresistibly danceable, uptempo 'Anthology', meanwhile, she pays tribute to Katherine Dunham, as she intones "the matriarch of black dance" over racing sub-bass. In addition to having one of the most successful dance careers of the 20th century, Dunham was also a choreographer, author, educator, anthropologist and social activist.

"She is a legend and everyone should learn more about her," says Ayewa. "She taught everyone from Eartha Kitt to James Dean. Everyone wanted to study dance with her."

For Muzeyyen, inspiration comes more in the form of an overall approach, with a focus on developing her own distinct aural palette.



MOOR MOTHER

DJ HARAM

"I really try to think more about what influenced the music I like, versus how to make my stuff sound like someone I admire," she explains. "I want my work to be more in conversation with my peers. I made a lot of the tracks using the Moog DFAM and I was trying to get somewhere with my sound design on it – that's a lot of the sludgy, rolling bass element.

"Lyrically, honestly, I had to say I'm really inspired by Moor Mother. At the same time, I'm also very much talking my shit in a light-hearted way. And I feel, whenever you talk shit, that you're actually just airing your worst fears. There's the vanity and the cocky thing, too. I love all of the pop-rap girls, people like Lil' Kim, Meg [Megan Thee Stallion], Cardi B, Nicki [Minaj]… everybody. Besides Moor Mother, these are probably the lyricists I pay attention to the most."

With titles like 'Easyjet', 'Spirit Airlines' and 'Nothing To Declare', you'd be forgiven for thinking that 700 Bliss have a penchant for taking to the skies.

"I love flying but sometimes I get emo thinking about everything," laughs Ayewa.

"While we were working on the album, Camae had this concept of a global passport idea," continues Muzeyyen. "That is definitely what is tied in aesthetically by the album artwork. I think it's also reflected in how our collaborators are all friends we've met on tour, or through being part of this super-local but also very global network of like-minded artists."

As for the album title, Muzeyyen explains that it's less about customs control and more an assertive statement of intent.

"I don't like to fight in order to be heard," she says. "And a lot of times, when you have to fight to be heard, people are not really going to listen to you anyway. So I was in this place where I felt, 'Alright, I'm going to say whatever'. Truth is truth, regardless of who speaks it."

'Easyjet' and 'Spirit Airlines' offer two of the album's briefest but funniest moments. The tracks function as skits where Ayewa and Muzeyyen mercilessly roast themselves.

"I don't like 700 Bliss," scoffs Ayewa on 'Easyjet'. "They're always talking about the end of the world / Motherfucker this, motherfucker that / It's just so dark", before Muzeyyen jumps in with, "Literally, who wants to hear that shit?". So how did these pieces come about?

"Camae sent me both of those as voice notes," laughs Muzeyyen. "She just went on this rant, and I cut it up and put my dialogue in to make it sound more like a phone call. When she first sent them to me without explanation, I cracked up. I was like, 'Oh, you're roasting me now?'. Damn, OK. But true!

"The best thing about working with Camae is our friendship and how much it generates in terms of creative ideas. And our ability to communicate, and our energy when we're together, either performing or working on stuff – I feel like that's the strongest thing we have. She is really like a noise-head, jazz-head, experimental artist. I don't know too many other rappers I can send these crazy soundscapes to and they'll be like, 'That's the beat'. Most of them would be like, 'Where is the beat?'."

Little wonder, then, with this kindred spirit connection, that 700 Bliss have turned out such an immersive, innovative debut album. Amid the rage, intensity and compelling calls to action, they admit there are plenty of reasons to be hopeful.

"I love all the music I'm making and the poems I'm writing," says Ayewa. "And for the future, just to grow and learn, speak truth and spread love."

"I feel as though there isn't really another option," agrees Muzeyyen. "And this is something I've definitely picked up from Camae over the years of our friendship. She's like, 'You know, the only option is moving on, moving forward, moving up, moving beyond'. For me, I want to live. I want to bring life into this world. There's *a lot* I want to bring into this world."

In the loud and powerful world of 'Nothing To Declare', ignorance isn't bliss, but truth, love and knowledge certainly are.

'Nothing To Declare' is out now on Hyperdub

EIGHT EXPECTATIONS

KELLY LEE OWENS

LP.8

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

Recorded in a wintery Oslo amid the ongoing disruption of Covid, this is the "eighth album" from Kelly Lee Owens. Except it's not – it's her third. This numeric trickery has happened before. Writer Nicholas Royle named his seventh novel 'First Novel', while 'One' was U2's 27th single. Those crazy kids.

While three may not be her magic number, North Wales producer Owens has done something different with this very real imaginary future album, partnering with Smalltown Supersound labelmate Lasse Marhaug for a series of unplanned studio sessions.

Marhaug is an experimental artist whose CV includes statically charged sound-scrapes with king of noise Merzbow, and an ear-putrefying drone show with Sunn O))). Their musical mood board was "somewhere in between Throbbing Gristle and Enya". Industrial meets ethereal. It's a heavy vibe to bring into the mix. While the record doesn't quite match peak 'Orinoco Flow' throes – I was fruitlessly imagining a black metal cover of 'Caribbean Blue' – just having this juxtaposition seems appropriate considering Owens' similarly duotone previous album 'Inner Song'. That fizzed with the brilliant contrasts of torch songs and techno.

'LP.8' starts with pressure cooker hisses, joined by insistent basement banging and Owens' breathless repetition of "Release, release, release". It sounds like either a command or an increasingly desperate request. Basically, we have a kidnap situation. A brief diversion into Andy Stott-style vocal cataclysms leads us to the totemic 'Anadlu'. Ghostly breaths circle a distinctly Celtic atmosphere, while a loose LFO-esque bass hammers for attention. There's that chest-tightening banging again. In one of several vocal mantras, Owens repeats "Anadlu", which is "breathe" in Welsh, but is easily misheard as a sweetly anglicised "I love you". Layers of wide strings accelerate into something Eno-ish and elegiac, and suddenly we're as far from Merzbow as Oslo is from Oz.

Gentler drones introduce the first truly Enya moment, with Owens in slow-mo ballad flow on 'S.O (2)'. "S-o-o-o…" she says endlessly, as her voice drips into smoothly suspended synths. Cue visions of windswept hills dotted with ambling sheep. This introduces a marshmallow middle to the album, full of extended woodwind, chiming ambience with a fuzz-ball bass, and warm soups of reverbed notes that dissipate the tension of the opening tracks. The damp pianoforte on 'Nana Piano' is not necessarily out of tune, its notes are just a little ruddy and ageing, the title's grandmotherly suggestion contributing to its heavy scent of nostalgia.

The chime of a dril-bu stops us in our tracks when 'Quickening' begins. It feels like a big moment on 'LP.8'. The meditational bell draws in another bombastically bassy bass, followed by diffused vocal shards and Owens telling us, "There is a vitality / An energy / Quickening that's translated through you into action". Despite the motivational talk, this is the quietest moment, with only fluttering static there to fill its audio voids. And then, from unseen fjords rise reedy wails that glide into a circle of harmonics. A Celtic swell. A gasp. The ghost of something hidden. It's a charming sequence that doesn't just dissipate tension – it flips the tension on its head.

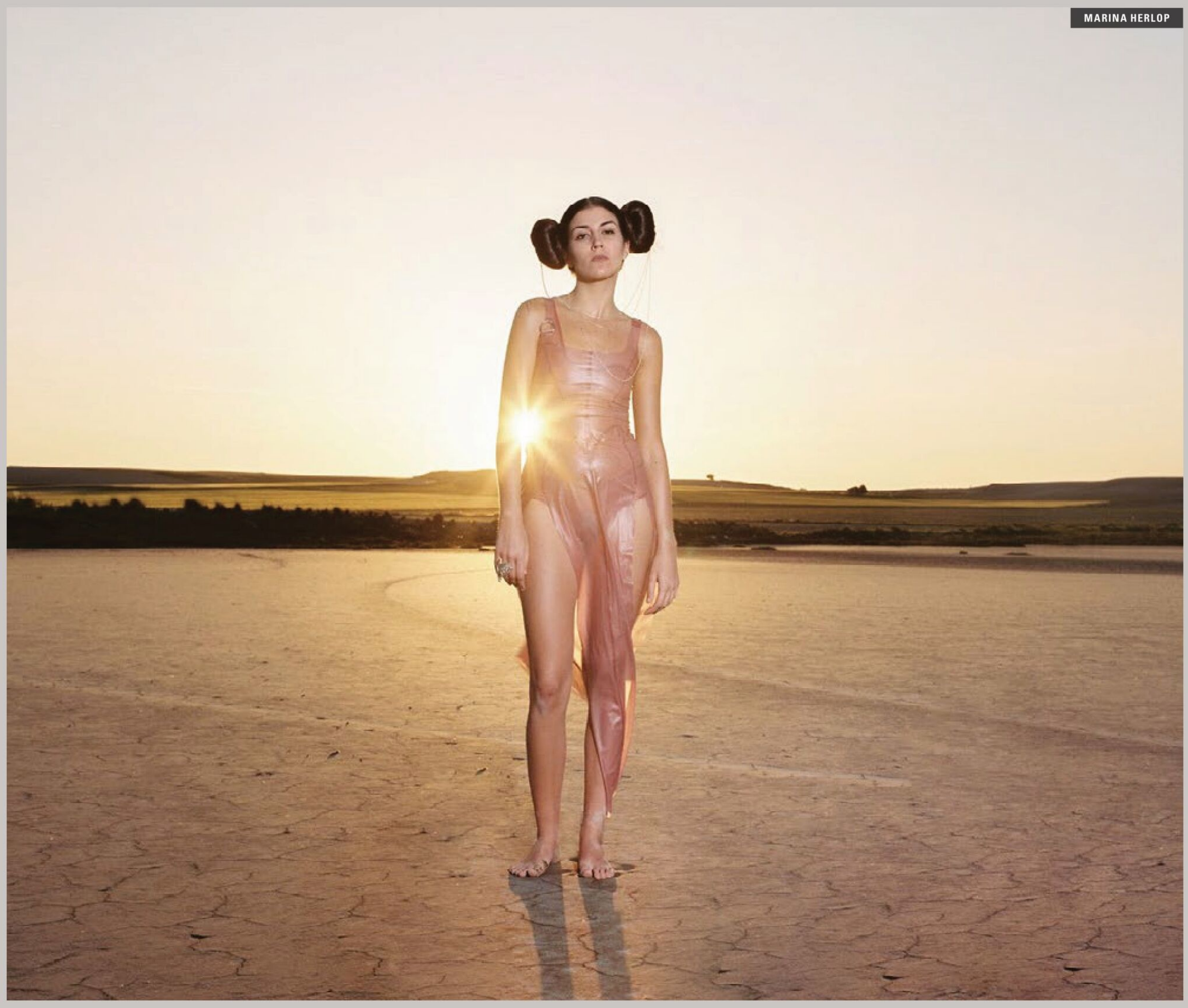
The eighth track is called 'One'. Yes, the confused calculations are back. A slow thrum beds Owens' placid voice in what turns out to be a simple love song. "You are the one," she says. "Everything is possible."

In a pleasingly unsettling call-back, the closing piece, 'Sonic 8', attempts to return to the taut ratchets of 'Release'. Marhaug's thunderous sonic interruptions rise yet again. Boom. Boom. There's some gristle in those throbs. Owens has an urgent conversational intervention with her own delirious whispers – her playful yet sincere narration wouldn't be out of place on Caro C's 'Electric Mountain'.

The question we must ask is, did the album soften up too much before this moment? Or was this the perfect expression of a locked-down musician cocooned from the pressures of "normal" gigging life? The mantras. The bells. The lyrical reassurances. Is this Kelly Lee Owens attaining nirvana?

I have an enduring image of Enya in her wispy 'Orinoco Flow' dress, valiantly detached and above all of the music. Kind of the opposite to Genesis P-Orridge ripping it up in some avant-garde underground den. Kelly Lee Owens is a hybrid of the two, the grand and the grubby offering some glorious musical contrasts. This pretend eighth album does not deviate from that, despite being loftier than the club clobber of her previous work. I'd mark it out of 10 but, to be honest, I've lost count.

FAT ROLAND



MARINA HERLOP
Pripyat
PAN

Listening to Marina Herlop's remarkable voice contort, warp, sparkle and dance across her third album, 'Pripyat', is akin to discovering a new hue in the rainbow in all its awe-inspiring colourfulness. Following in the footsteps of vocal innovators like Kate Bush and Björk, the Catalan producer takes her voice to new heights, as on the mesmerising 'Miu', while the piano-laced 'Abans Abans' showcases her ability to combine classical training with deft computer manipulation and riveting electronic textures. Stunning stuff. **CF**

ALISON COTTON
The Portrait You Painted Of Me
ROCKET

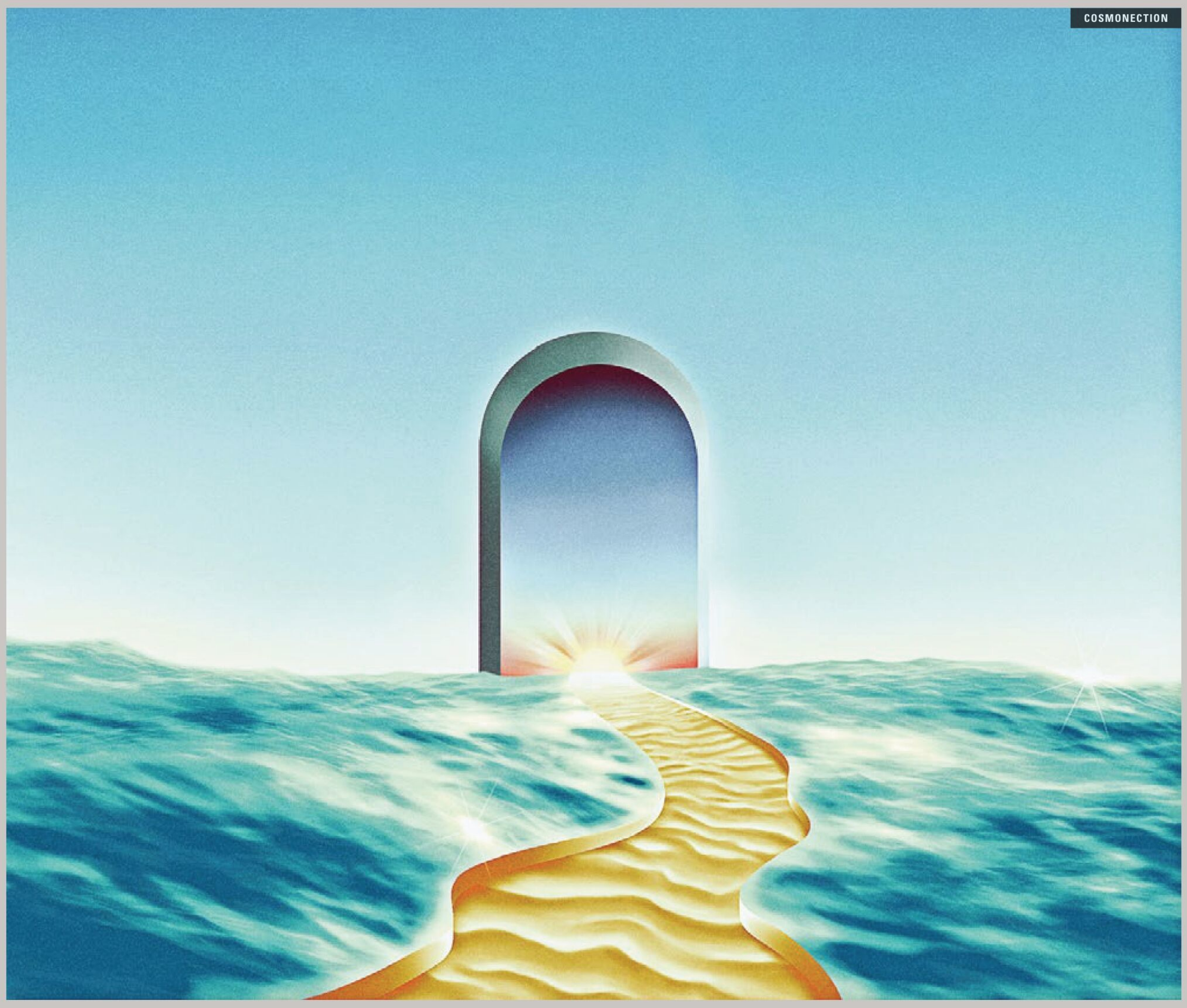
Alongside her work with psychedelic folkies The Left Outsides, Alison Cotton has a sideline in decidedly experimental solo albums. 'The Last Wooden Ship' is the lynchpin here – 11 stunning minutes of mournful, manipulated viola worthy of John Cale at his most austere, although Cotton's soundscapes are more Wearside foundry than Warhol's Factory. Nevertheless, the mood remains funereal – the chilling '17th November 1962' marks the loss of nine lives on a Seaham lifeboat. The bleak romanticism of Cotton's native North East adds warmth and humanity to this beautifully evocative collection. **BF**

REKID
99
RUNNING BACK

Though best known as Radio Slave, Berlin-based Matt Edwards first came to prominence as Rekid with the opiated house and weird electronics of his 2006 debut album 'Made In Menorca'. After a spell in cryogenic storage, he's revived the project, and '99' is a new excursion into downtempo territory. 'Day 2' is a bleepy hip hop piece that hints at a love of Dabrye, whereas 'Day 7' is a cosmic, beat-free exercise in eerie synth loops. Intoxicating. **BM**

I SPEAK MACHINE
War
BANDCAMP

If you're familiar with LA producer and synthesist Tara Busch, you'll know that her earlier work used electronics and an alluring, retro persona to create an updated Delia Derbyshire facade that could coo like Tori Amos. But for her I Speak Machine project, where she creates music for her husband Maf Lewis' surreal films, she fully releases her inner Trent Reznor – aggressively lashing out on tracks like the titular 'War' or 'The Metal Of My Hell'. It's where Goldfrapp might have gone if they had decided to eschew more of their glamour for leather-studded belligerence. A standout release. **JS**



COSMONECTION
Hidden Places
PONT NEUF

Part of Paris' ever-evolving electronic scene, dance producer Cosmonection (Adrien Erra) has recently made an impression with his emotive tracks. His debut album arrives on Pont Neuf, a key label in the French capital, and traverses multiple genres. 'Big Sur' has the horizon-chasing synths of deep house, 'Sleeping Storms' is a throwback to classic trip hop, and 'Frágil' is Miami electro-funk, all shot through with intricate detail and heart-on-sleeve feeling. **BM**

SKINLESS LIZARD
Andromeda
EREMO

This album is the third part of a "restoration project" that sees Skinless Lizard – Italian musician Aldo Martinoia – revisiting his high school sonic experiments from the late 2000s, originally intended to service would-be rap collabs. Thought to have been lost until recently, these repolished cuts (11, all told) make for a highly engaging journey, moving from the proto-chillwave of the title track to the hardvapour-ish vibe of 'In Their Throats', while the fab 'Myth And Convalescence' sounds like it was lifted from the soundtrack to 'Stranger Things'. **JS**

MIMICOF
Distant Symphony
KARLRECORDS

The custom EMS Synthi 100 at Radio Belgrade's Electronic Studio is as hefty as a 1960s telephone switchboard. This was the solo instrument used by Berlin's Midori "MimiCof" Hirano for this 2021 residency performance. Three long tracks, three distinct moods, lots of knobs. We circle from sunset-wide sirens and insect buzzes to atom-thin pulses and gorgeous analogue harmonies. The highlight is 'Distant Symphony II', a rhythmic 'Tubular Bells' echo that brings the prog rave out of this monster synth. **FR**

MEADOWSILVER
II
MILLERSOUNDS

Stephen Stannard (The Rowan Amber Mill) and Grey Malkin (The Hare And The Moon) team up with Burd Ellen vocalist Gayle "Pefkin" Brogan for an album so steeped in ancient weirdness it should really come delivered by 'Obby 'Oss. Opening track 'Garland Queens & Old Straw Bears' sets the tone, with Brogan's breathy vocal floating like autumnal mist through a forest of tinkling synths and psychedelic guitars. Elsewhere, 'Ophelia Beneath The Weeping Willows' is like a hymnal Dubstar, and 'The Breath Of The Ice Queen' a vengeful Vashti Bunyan. Magik. **BF**

RON TRENT

WARM: What Do The Stars Say To You

NIGHT TIME STORIES

Detroit techno icon Ron Trent takes a stylistic detour of sorts with his new WARM project, inspired by the luxurious and expansive funk, jazz and soul albums of the 1970s. Of course, the ingredients are the same as his dancefloor efforts – tracks like 'Flos Potentia (Sugar, Cotton, Tabacco)', featuring Khruangbin, have grooves, and stirring, spiritual instrumentation, set to an older template. Revered violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and Brazilian jazz-funksters Azymuth number among the guests, while François Kevorkian masters the album and provides a continuously mixed version. **BW**

LEVON VINCENT

Silent Cities

NOVEL SOUND

Stethoscopes at the ready. Vincent's fourth album pumps to a slower rhythm, circulating around the tempo of his own heartbeat – 72 bpm, to be precise. Flowing arteries of smoky breaks turn the dancefloor into domesticity. The rave attacks of 2019's 'World Order Music' may be absent, but the Berlin producer's all-dominating synths still run hot. 'Wolves' is epic electropop despite the drums mostly bleeding out. The album's overly simplistic melodies might not be a heartstopper, but this is still worth a flutter. **FR**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Yhdessä: A Fundraiser For Ukraine

SÄVY

Finnish DJ IDA runs Sävy Records, a label dedicated to exploratory club music. Her 21-track compilation 'Yhdessä: A Fundraiser For Ukraine' has the admirable aim of generating money for Unicef and Save The Children in the war-stricken country – but it's also an impressive snapshot of unorthodox dance rhythms. Tracing Xircles' 'Sanctuary' mixes celestial synth melodies and breakbeats, while SVZZ's 'Bad Product' is a lo-fi spray of drum machine grit and rough rave riffs. Excellent throughout. **BM**

RALPH HEIDEL

Modern Life

KRYPTOX

This talented Berlin multi-instrumentalist follows his head-turning 2019 debut 'Moments Of Resonance' with this brilliant, genre-defying long-player. A graduate of the renowned Musikhochschule München, Heidel effortlessly melds vintage-sounding, gently organic electronics with elements of drone-jazz and pastoral neoclassicism into a roundly coherent whole. Right from the beguilingly multi-textured opener 'Avi', we're carried on a singular journey that peaks with life-affirming standout 'Hulo', all nostalgic warmth and delicately skittering arrangements. **CG**

PRIVATE AGENDA

A Mannequin

LO RECORDINGS

What a blissful, luxuriously textured and cerebral sound this London/Berlin duo have perfected since 2019's well-received debut, 'Île De Rêve'. Future-pop at its finest, the dozen tracks here effortlessly journey through the contradictions and idiosyncrasies that define us, as distinct character traits are imagined in musical form. Delicately poised tracks like 'Gemini' or 'Touching' channel the soulful futurism of Bullion or Toro Y Moi, while the elegant and cosmopolitan 'Splendour' smoulders in its own irresistible groove. **CG**

ORBURY COMMON

The Traditional Dance Of Orbury Common

PRAH

The mythical Orbury Common summons to mind a place full of standing stones and ley lines, with traces of ghost raves transmitting from decades ago. Made by Bristol and Stroud-based musicians Josh Day-Jones and Emlyn Bainbridge, 'The Traditional Dance Of Orbury Common' is a melange of crisp beats, otherworldly samples and pastoral electronica. 'Haberdashery' is a proverbial pile-up of cut-up sounds, all held together by a pulsing undercurrent, while 'The Cutting Edge' scoots along, propelled by tactile hi-hat action that becomes more foreboding with each beat. **JA**

AUTOMATISME & STEFAN PAULUS

Gap/Void

CONSTELLATION

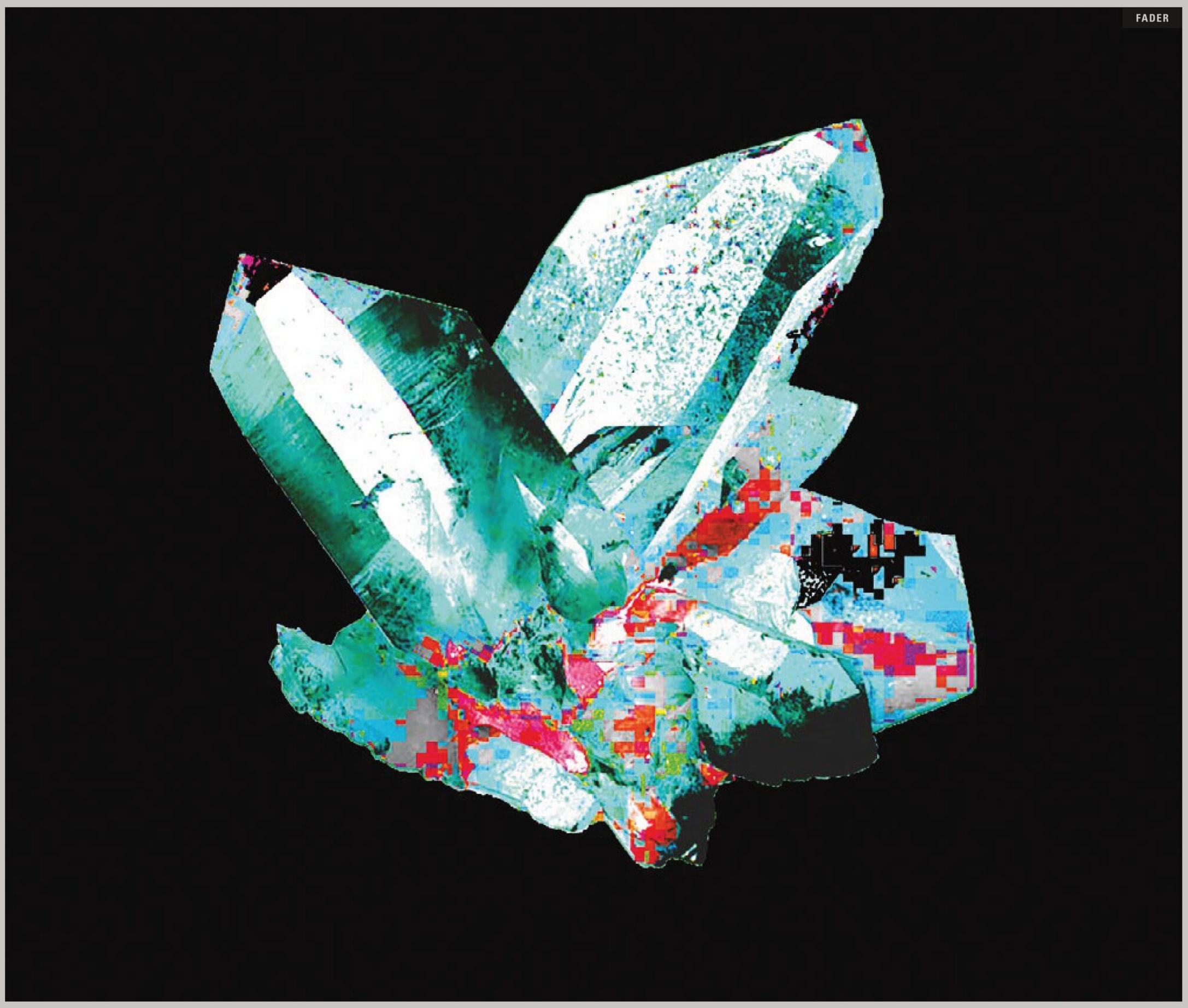
Canadian producer Automatisme, aka William Jourdain, is best known for his prolific collaborations with like-minded souls from across the globe. Here, he teams up with Swiss field recordist and musician Stefan Paulus, with results that are way more sturdy and rhythmic than the average ambient effort. The likes of 'Üble Schlucht' and opening track 'Säntis' sound bold and confident, bringing heavy grooves together with a blizzard-like swirl of glitches. Good work. **BW**

DYLAN MOON

Option Explore

RVNG INTL

On LA musician Dylan Moon's second album, opening track '10 Apples' shines out from beneath synth surfaces dappled with VHS beats, like a 1980s self-help video made by Max Tundra. With a bit of new age bliss and a spot of retro-futurist polish, the album's melodic hooks are similar to 2019's 'Only The Blues', but with a more beguiling electronic drift. Further on, 'Creaking' layers panpipe synth sounds over foggy vocals and 'I-80' sounds like My Bloody Valentine covering an Enya song about the ennui of Middle America. **ST**



FADER
Quartz
BLANC CHECK

Interior decorating has never looked – or sounded – so good in the hands of Neil Arthur and Benge, who continue to go from strength to strength as Fader on 'Quartz', their third long-player. Between his solo albums and work as part of Wrangler, Creep Show and John Foxx And The Maths, Benge's shimmering sound manipulation is funnelled into tracks named after the different paint pots used while redecorating his house. Arthur, meanwhile, adds an elegiac Kraftwerkian vocal to 'Serpentine', and 'Prussian' is a glittering music box of stargazing electronica. An understated gem. **CF**

µ-ZIQ
Magic Pony Ride
PLANET MU

Fans of Mike Paradinas have been having all their Christmasses at once recently, with unreleased archive goodies galore. This is a much rarer beast – a completely new album. That said, its musical flavour was inspired by the remastering of his classic late 1990s 'Lunatic Harness' LP, returning to its junglist beats and bittersweet melodic interplay. Whereas '…Harness' is a sometimes anguished affair that's full of friction, the likes of 'Brown Chaos' and 'Don't Tell Me (It's Ending)' here are more reconciled, mature and reflective. No less inventive, mind – maybe just a little more balanced. **BW**

THICK AIR
Pillars Of Creation
NOT NOT FUN

Thick Air is Portland, Maine's Matt LaJoie, and on 'Pillars Of Creation' he drapes odd electronic rumbles in a warming new age glow. Consisting of four elongated pieces, LaJoie's work often recalls that of Not Not Fun labelmate, Sun Araw. Rather than a sun-parched earthiness, though, tracks such as 'Neptunian Resonance' and 'Horizon Dip' are bathed in an increasingly intense cosmic light. By the time 'Surface Of…' drifts in, the sustained stellar dazzle has taken full effect, conjuring a beguiling and hypnotic sci-fi meditation loop. **ST**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Air Texture VIII: Anthony Naples + DJ Python
AIR TEXTURE

Brooklyn's Anthony Naples and DJ Python, two titans of leftfield, downtempo electronica, take the helm of the eighth compilation from New York label Air Texture. Eschewing peak-time bangers in favour of sultry, moody compositions, this 18-track collection is a real delight. The monstrous yet understated groove of Aurora Halal and DJ G's 'Off The Top' is an early standout, but quirky and unhurried is mostly the name of the game, with contributions from Huerco S, Downstairs J, and Naples and DJ Python themselves. An excellent snapshot of contemporary club life in Brooklyn and beyond. **CF**

X.Y.R.
Aquarealm
NOT NOT FUN

This 10th album by St Petersburg electronic artist Vladimir "X.Y.R." Karpov was inspired by watching his fish swimming around their aquarium, yielding 10 tracks of sedate, melodic grace that perfectly evokes the weightless movements of aquatic life. 'Species Of Fishes' has a playful and flighty timbre, while the inquisitive tone of 'Coral Reef Exploration' is reminiscent of a curious fish rooting around the bottom of its tank. But it's the gently overlapping waves and bubbling melodies of 'Emerald Dream' that stand out, the charming highlight of this wonderfully unhurried, becalming release. **MS**

ANTELOPER
Pink Dolphins
INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

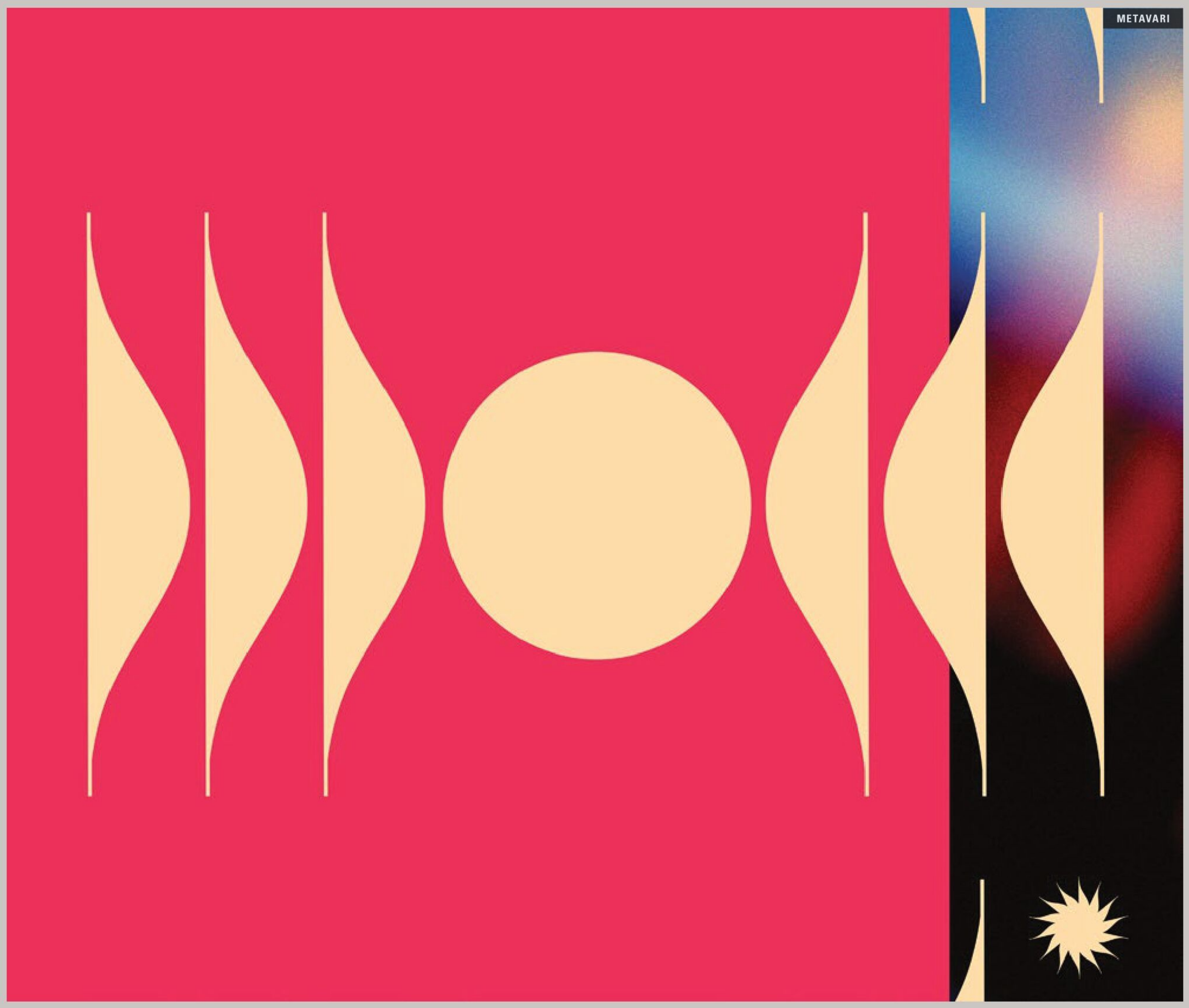
New York-based duo jaimie branch (the lower case styling is hers) and Jason Nazary are Anteloper, and their third album, 'Pink Dolphins', swims deep in rivers of jazz trumpet and double bass, flooded with synth drones and nods to beat-driven club music. You can hear touches of Miles Davis' 1970s experiments in 'Delfin Rosado', though there's also a free-form energy imparted by post-rock and the record's producer, Jeff Parker (Tortoise). 'Earthlings', meanwhile, could be J Dilla at his oddest. Out-there brilliance. **BM**

DIARIES OF DESTRUCTION
Diaries Of Destruction
BANDCAMP

As Diaries Of Destruction, Turkish producer Elif Yalvaç is a dexterous sound sculptor, chipping away at the dark, rough edges of noise until brightness filters in, like digging for light at the end of a tunnel. 'Defences Against Emptiness' channels claustrophobic sweeps of demolition sounds and barking dogs into a comforting hip hop rhythm, before morphing into jagged guitar feedback. Twisting and layering field recordings with synths, drum programming and guitars, she captures the experience of being stuck in lockdown in Turkey during the sweltering summer of 2020 in vivid aural detail. **CF**

NICOLAS BERNIER
Science Fiction
BANDCAMP

"There is darkness mid-deck," intones American poet Fortner Anderson at the beginning of 'Science Fiction', Montreal composer/sound artist Nicolas Bernier's eight-track collaboration with various guest vocalists. But there is some light mid-deck as well. On 'Fiction 3', singer Eleuthera adds semi-impassive wordplay atop Bernier's electroacoustics, while elsewhere, the interplay between figures such as avant-garde rapper Beans and non-binary AI artist Av3ry make this a uniquely surreal sound collage. **JS**



METAVARI

Soft Continuum (Studies Vol 2)

JOYFUL NOISE

Balancing brittle electronica and sweeping, epic swells, the fifth album by Indiana's Metavari is dedicated to founding member Ty Brinneman, who passed away in 2020 from mesothelioma. His final recordings have been expanded to create a new age kosmische work whose centrepiece is a number of conceptualised tracks titled after the stages of a star's rare "stellar rebirth". It simultaneously seeks to articulate both inner and outer space. The outstandingly moving final effort, 'Bloom', sees radio mic chatter framed by haunting keyboard murmuring to staggering effect. **AT**

ANDREAS HIROUI LARSSON

Seduced By (A) Last Year

THANATOSIS PRODUKTION

Recorded live in Stockholm in August 2021, 'Seduced By (A) Last Year' features Andreas Hiroui Larsson, Johanna Arve and Johan Jutterström extemporising about musical theory, semantics and improvisatory concepts over an ever-shifting palette of saxophone, field recordings and percussion. It's properly immersive – a section mid-way through this 35-minute set features a proto-rhythm formed of footsteps and wind across an unshielded microphone, followed by atmospheric prayer calls, traffic sounds and the solitary bar of a hip hop break. Enriching, intelligent and hugely rewarding. **MS**

POLIÇA

Madness

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Led by vocalist/voice manipulator Channy Leaneagh, this much-lauded Minneapolis five-piece return to blistering form here. After first turning heads on 2012 debut 'Give You The Ghost', 'Madness' takes Poliça's irresistible coldwave futurism into what they describe as the "end point to the first phase" of their career to date. It's a fitting encapsulation of their essential, trademark sound, marrying experimental downtempo neoclassicism (see 'Blood' or the electrifying title track), with propulsive synthpop belters like the standout 'Alive'. **CG**

THE NEW ELECTRIC FRONTIER

The Consequences Of Erosion

BANDCAMP

As The British Stereo Collective, square-eyed Stoke producer Phil Heeks creates splendidly authentic spoof TV themes, tongue often planted firmly in cheek. 'The Consequences Of Erosion' is a more earnest examination of ecological issues, but his ear for pastiche remains unrivalled. So it's hard to hear the squelchy synths of 'Technik' or 'Petrosexual' without imagining a dire warning on 'Tomorrow's World' about the dangers of spray-on deodorant. 'Critical Mass' is the high point – a moody collaboration with Gavin "The Metamorph" Brick, equally in thrall to both Giorgio Moroder and Judith Hann. **BF**

LIA MICE
Sweat Like Caramel
OBJECTS LIMITED

Conceived during lockdown, the fourth album from 2021 Oram Award winner Lia Mice was inspired by the London producer's then-remote idea of returning to clubs. These tracks are propelled by a vital early 1980s electro energy, all rattling beats, squidgy basslines and processed vocals. The title track, despite its wild overlapping sequences and twitchy rhythms, has a thoughtful plaintiveness in its fragile concluding moments, while the psychedelic haziness of 'We Dance Back To Back' feels like watching frantic clubbers in slow motion. Anti-perspirant not supplied. **MS**

LAND OF YRX
Forget The Lessons Of The Past!
POLYTECHNIC YOUTH

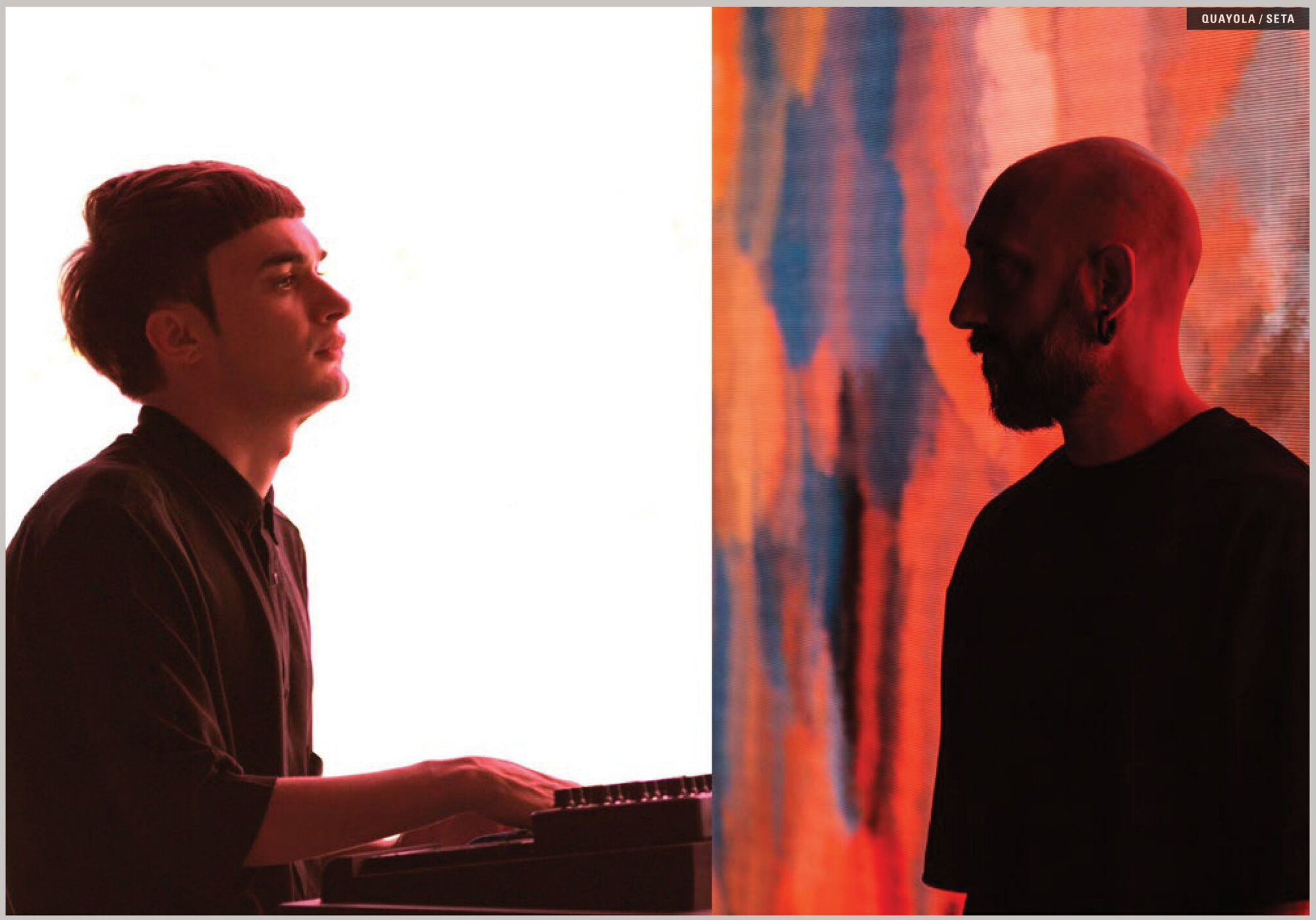
Polytechnic Youth strike gold again with this cracking compilation of tracks by Shrewsbury's Land Of Yrx, aka Rob Andrews and David Gate. Taken from cassette recordings made between 1982 and 1984, the pair's experimental jams skitter enticingly between analogue electronics, new wave, kosmische and even prog-like vibes. Standout cut 'The Ritual Watussi (Of The Clockwork Refrigerator) Part 1' recalls The Normal's 'TVOD', its strident urgency ameliorated by single-finger synth melodies, while 'Annus Mirabilis 1984' wallows in its own warm, Cluster-esque cocoon. Just wonderful. **VI**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Colleen "Cosmo" Murphy presents Balearic Breakfast: Volume 1
HEAVENLY

Breakfast in the Spanish sun, anyone? DJ, broadcaster and producer Colleen "Cosmo" Murphy takes the idyllic vibes of her weekly radio shows on Worldwide FM and serves up sun-kissed sonic treats on her first 'Balearic Breakfast' compilation. From the mood-setting first track 'Sa Fosca' – a dreamy prog-guitar odyssey by Mallorcan musician Joan Bibiloni – to the neon-lit synth boogie of Fragile's 'We've Got Tonight, Boy' and Murphy's own disco-fied remix of Midlife's 'Vapour', this tantalising selection of tracks is reason enough to swap the cups of tea and toast for exotic fruits and poolside cocktails. **CF**

KRISTIN OPPENHEIM
Voices Fill My Head: Collected Sound Works 1993-1999
INFO

Kristin Oppenheim is a New York sound artist who began exhibiting her work in the 1990s. This collection comprises eight astounding pieces utilising only her voice. It begins with 'Hey Joe' and, initially, appears to be a straightforward, breathily minimalist rendition of a classic. But as the piece progresses, Oppenheim scatters whispers beneath the main vocal, intensifying its noir-ish feel. This sense of mystery characterises the entire suite, from the hypnotic loop of 'Tap Your Shoes' to the hushed garble of 'The Eyes I Remember'. Recommended. **ST**



QUAYOLA / SETA

Transient

QUAYOLA STUDIO

'Transient' pairs Italian visual artist Davide Quayola with pianist and programmer Seta, aka Andrea Santicchia. Quayola is best known for installations developed using custom software and algorithms, manipulating classical art, sculpture and architecture into modern inversions of themselves. With 'Transient', Quayola and Seta have applied the same approach to the venerable piano, making it akin to a Victorian pianola where the music rolls contain computer-generated complexity.

Without knowing the conceptual basis, you might assume that this album belongs on the axis occupied by Michael Nyman and Philip Glass – pieces like 'Transient #B_020-01' and 'Transient #B_022-03' are full of delicate repeated cycles of notes and subtle electronic gestures.

There's a point of departure halfway through the latter piece – and which can be heard most fully on 'Transient #D_007-02' – where the manner of playing takes on a pointillistic, dizzying dexterity that reveals the decisive nature of the algorithms. Bold yet sensitive excursions into the future of classical composition. **MS**

HANS CASTRUP

Constant Imbalances V

SUBMARINE BROADCASTING COMPANY

Multidisciplinary artist, Germany's Hans Castrup, has navigated his 'Constant Imbalances' series through various disparate practices. The first two instalments comprised poems and graphics, the third part was an album released on Submarine Broadcasting Company, and the fourth part was a series of paintings that responded to its predecessor.

'V' returns Castrup to music, containing eight pieces of orchestral stateliness pushed through aggressive processing to create a soundtrack for disconcerting times. It's relentless. On pieces like 'Kaytempure' and 'Goderate', metallic textures and thwarted moments leave only the tiniest space for temporary, fleeting euphoria.

'Rehavine' is perhaps the album's tonal departure, a tentative excursion toward a prairie sunset with whooshing synth comets, birdsong and mysterious, fragile half-melodies. If nothing else, the finely-wrought pieces here feel like a necessary sonic riposte to the current slew of therapeutic ambient music. **MS**

HAWKSMOOR

Head Coach

SPUN OUT OF CONTROL

"A psychogeographical mapping of the urban landscape of Milton Keynes"? Sold. With hypnotic synth arpeggios and wobbly analogue washes, Bristol's James McKeown celebrates the Druidic significance of Buckinghamshire's most notorious new town. No, really. In the early 1970s, legend has it that lead architect Derek Walker shifted his plans by a few degrees to allow the freshly built streets – and, presumably, their accompanying concrete cows – to afford a perfect view of the sunrise on midsummer mornings.

The appropriately titled opener 'Solstice Alignment' is a tinkling lullaby, undermined by skulking menace. 'Silbury Boulevard' is a Floyd-esque pillow of chiming guitars, an out-of-body experience above executive apartments.

But it's 'The Medicine Wheel' that really captures the mood, a pulsing synth homage to a mystical stone circle built not by ancient Druids, but by Milton Keynes Parks Trust for their millennium celebrations. Fuelled by these glorious incongruities, McKeown hits that perpetually evocative sweet spot between Ballardian brutalism and antediluvian oddness. **BF**

BETTER CORNERS
Modern Dance Gold: Vol. 1
THE STATE51 CONSPIRACY

What with one thing and another, the last couple of years have prompted an abundance of remote collaborations and albums pieced together by going back and forth across the ether. While there have been lots of interesting results, few have felt as richly cohesive and gloomily intense as 'Modern Dance Gold: Vol 1'.

Better Corners are drummer Valentina Magaletti (Tomaga, Vanishing Twin), vocalist and musician Sarah Register (Kim Gordon, Talk Normal) and guitarist Matthew Simms (Wire, Slows, It Hugs Back). 'Living Prayers' opens with a claustrophobia that builds to the record's cacophonous conclusion, a rolling feedback crunch that washes over distant voices, while the dense tectonic churn of tracks such as 'It Feels Like Forever' and 'Gallery Dept' offer much more abrasive textures than those found on Magaletti and co's individual projects.

Where other remotely assembled projects often feel as though the musicians were in separate rooms, Better Corners sound not only unified, but like they have huddled together in the turbine room of a supertanker. **ST**

ANDREAS DORAU
Ich Bin Der Eine Von Uns Beiden
TAPETE

Hamburg-born musician Andreas Dorau is something of an anomaly in Germany, and he's no less inscrutable in the UK, but probably for different reasons. His first notoriety in his home country came with the electropop whimsy of 'Fred Vom Jupiter' at the cessation of the German new wave in 1981, and Dorau scored his first proper hit album in Germany 36 years later with 2017's 'Die Liebe Und Der Ärger Der Anderen' (loosely, 'The Love And Anger Of Others').

One album the Germans missed out on then was the arcane electronic record 'Ich Bin Der Eine Von Uns Beiden', first released on Mute in 2005. The underground Deutscher Sänger splits his personality in two on this record, between the heartfelt songs of Andreas, and the beastly outpourings of the wild boar Dorau (pictured hugging Andreas on the cover).

The album is far more cohesive than it sounds, though. 'Im September' is catchy electronic cabaret, and 'Hinterhaus' takes things up a notch with its playful nocturnal frivolity. It's a charming oddity from start to finish. **JA**

HERCULES & LOVE AFFAIR
In Amber
SKINT/BMG

Andy Butler returns with his first Hercules & Love Affair album in five years, almost 15 years after hit 2008 single 'Blind' featuring Anohni, the former lead singer of Antony And The Johnsons.

For 'In Amber', Butler and Anohni have reunited for the first time since that late-2000s dance heyday, reviving the spirit of indie sleaze with perfect timing. Despite his innate ability to pen nu-disco bangers, Butler's tunes have never shied away from exploring sadness and longing, and here we get poignant meditations aplenty, from pensive, lumbering ballad 'You've Won This War' to the crunchy, scraping soundscapes that mirror the scornful mood of 'Contempt For You'.

As main vocalist across the 12 tracks, Anohni's operatic tones ramp up the emotional resonance, but she and Butler still know how to move a dancefloor – see the pulsing bass of pumping anthem 'One', the John Grant-esque 'Grace' or the thunderous 'Poisonous Storytelling', with the latter two both lending themselves perfectly to recent remixes by Kris Baha and Giant Swan. **CF**

THE OT X-TET
The Bridge To Total Freedom
HOME ASSEMBLY MUSIC

Entire books have been written about the impact of jazz on hip hop. Yet some of the most beguiling exchanges occur when the tide turns the other way. THE OT X-TET, Philadelphian hip hop producer MALK's latest alias, is a case in point.

Even after spending a year in London, immersing himself in the capital's contemporary jazz scene – now that's dedication – MALK humbly describes his new sound as "basically jazz", yet there's a load more sonic influences at play here.

An Afrobeat rhythm shuffles away on 'A Link To The Future', while 'Unknown Unknowns' is a Brit-funk delight, buoyed by cosmic Roy Ayers-esque synth lasers. The standout, though, is 'Dropping It In Front Of Their Eyes', a phantasmagoria of raga-like drones, birdsong and ambient jazz splendour. Over all of this hangs an endearing library fuzz, most prevalent on the dusty organ and tiptoeing hi-hats of the upbeat 'Rodney's Theme'.

Is this cross-pollination, or merely an artist exploring the limits of their creativity? Either way, let's not mince our words. 'The Bridge To Total Freedom' is a total joy. **ILS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Back To Mine: Horse Meat Disco
BACK TO MINE

Four-strong DJ squad Horse Meat Disco's Sunday night sessions at Vauxhall's Eagle pub have been a pillar of London's gay scene for longer than some younger music writers have been alive, but recently their sets, edits and productions have elevated them way beyond those confines.

Here, they display a very similar kind of knack for inclusivity and infectiousness – there's nothing obvious nor obscurist here. The opening tune, Gwen McCrae's 'Move Me Baby (Danny Krivit Edit)', is a grinning, sweating glory of party funk, but having set that tone they're unafraid to take risks with it, bringing it back down as HMD's own Severino Panzetta and Ray Mang remix 'Perfidia' by Alien Alien, duly rebuilding it from scratch.

Other highlights include Marianne Faithfull's electro-shocking 'Sex With Strangers' (featuring Beck), Escape From New York's 'Fire In My Heart', a journey from melodic, Art Of Noise-style fragility to passion-filled camp disco noir, and the infectious boogie/funk/Italo vibes of The Rah Band's essential 'Messages From The Stars'. **BW**

CRAIG FORTNAM
Instrumental Music 1
BELIEVER'S ROAST

An album about "nothing at all"? It's a curveball from composer Craig Fortnam, whose work with both North Sea Radio Orchestra and Arch Garrison has never flinched from lofty concepts. But even without a furrowed-brow narrative, Fortnam's second solo album distills the melancholic eccentricity that has trickled through his work like an underground stream.

Divest the word of jingoistic flimflam and there's an Englishness here that is profoundly charming. Yearning sighs, long afternoons in dusty bookshops, cold cups of tea with a milky film. 'Gigant' might be the most delightful album opener of the year – playful bassoons give way to mellifluous guitars, chattering synths, and mournful strings from a wistful ensemble surely dotted with crumbs of Victoria sponge.

Elsewhere, all of Fortnam's touchstones are… well, touched. Stackridge, Caravan, Kevin Ayers. 'Carrot Two' is even a jerky nod to Cardiacs. And the closing 'Gallants Green' feels like an autumnal hymn to Betjeman's 'Metro-Land', slowly derailing into blissful wonkiness. Exquisite. **BF**

JCRS

Arclight

AUGUST DAY

Melodic synth superduo go ultra-Berlin

JCRS might sound like a dodgy security company, but it is actually the acronym for a new collaboration between two synthpop stalwarts – John Crawford, architect of American new wave band Berlin, and Robin Simon, formerly of John Foxx-era Ultravox. Both men have certainly accrued a great deal of experience over the decades in a business more unforgiving than most. Berlin hit paydirt in the mid-1980s with their Giorgio Moroder-produced 'Top Gun' theme 'Take My Breath Away', though it became such a monstrous hit that it siphoned away most of the attention. Simon left a disintegrating Ultravox and got married to a girl from New York who he met during their disastrous 1979 US tour, little expecting his erstwhile band to rise like a phoenix.

Despite these setbacks, 'Arclight' is not an album for dwelling on former glories or failures, even if its sonic palette is very much drawn from the era both men are best known for. It's a forward-looking and confident collection of songs, but there's no disguising the fact it sounds exactly how you might expect a collaboration between two figures of the classic synthpop era to sound, with songs that could easily have emanated from any medium wave radio in Britain in 1983. What elevates the album beyond retro nostalgia is the quality of the songwriting.

There's a melodic urgency to tracks like 'There's Only You', which features an instrumental motif suffused with an unhurried simplicity, threatening to imbed itself in your brain like an active landmine. These pop songs border on anthemic at times, somewhere between goth rock and pomp rock, though Crawford and Simon are able to change gear just as easily on smoother, more delicate efforts like 'Slide' or 'I Could Stand On My Own'.

Things get even more interesting when they deviate from the script. The disco-funk of the two-part 'Vectors' is invigorating, and 'The Universe Suddenly Shrinks With One Thought' – which suggests they might have been listening to The Orb now and again – is a tantalising glimpse at another trancey direction they could have gone in, with celestial voices and Frippertronics galore. It'll be interesting to see where they take us next.

JEREMY ALLEN

Brief Encounters

John Foxx collaborator and JCRS man **Robin Simon** faces down the quick-fire question machine

Where are you right now and what can you see?

"In the woods at the back of Skipton Castle in Yorkshire. I can see the river and trees and the cliffs from the bridge that looks up to the back of the castle."

If you could have five minutes with the teenage you, what would you say to him?

"I'd be in London – I moved there in 1975 when I was 19. I used to walk past Malcolm McLaren's shop, Sex, on the King's Road to rehearse with my band Neo in Fulham. I would tell myself to insist on auditioning when I replied to the ad McLaren ran for a guitarist."

You've worked with Ultravox, Magazine, Visage and John Foxx And The Maths – do you have a favourite?

"I liked Ultravox best as I had input in the direction. Magazine were maybe the most exciting to play with live."

Your distinctive guitar work on Ultravox's 'Systems Of Romance' primed the sound of the 1980s. That's a decent legacy.

"Well, it was recorded in a very modern way for the time. I used six floor pedals straight to tape. Conny would then add extreme phaser effects or a touch of ring mod, which made it sound like a synth."

Ah, the great Conny Plank. How was it working with him?

"It was great. He was a very nice character, humble compared to some producers. He didn't try to impose his music tastes or turn it into something it wasn't. He would capture the performance then augment the sound."

Give us an example?

"'Dislocation' was instigated by a random riff he had on a sequencer. The notes seemed variable so John Foxx just sang over the sequencer. I think the electronic percussion was down to Conny and John too."

You can hear much of what Ultravox went on to become on 'Systems', can't you?

"The lyrics on 'Just For A Moment' were inspired by singing to the music the machine made on 'Dislocation'. To me, it's the blueprint for 'Vienna'. Tracks like that and 'Sleepwalk' were based on John's songwriting style, but they seemed to refuse to give him any credit, which I thought was disappointing."

So, you and John Crawford – Ultravox meets Berlin. That's an interesting brew…

"I was keen to try another combination of a Europop/rock-style band. I noticed August Day Records were doing a lot of orchestral albums of 80s bands… when I saw they were working with Berlin I thought I'd ask about them. Then I was in LA and we had a chance meeting. I thought John would be a perfect collaborator for me, so we tried it."

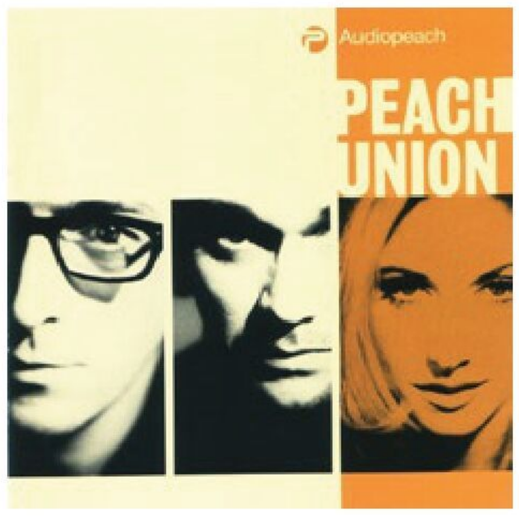
You made the 'Arclight' album in a week – that's good going…

"There wasn't really a lot of time spent on it – just enough to keep it a spontaneous project."

Recording and releasing music is so much easier these days, don't you think?

"It can have its downsides. I think a lot of hits are too recognisable as just a backing track with a singer over it. They're lacking the sort of musicianship that was always valued by people like Bowie, or the fire and passion that a band can produce."

Buried Treasure



PEACH

Audiopeach

EPIC/MUTE, 1997

Aside from its troubling "what if?" premise, two things stayed with me about the 1998 film 'Sliding Doors', and neither of these were Gwyneth Paltrow's British accent. The first was John Hannah explaining that we are born with a full and comprehensive knowledge of The Beatles' lyrics. The second was the inclusion of 'On My Own' by Peach on its soundtrack.

Fronted by vocalist Lisa Lamb and arising from a dance-oriented one-off project called Neuronic, the other members of Peach were former B-Movie guitarist Paul Statham and S'Express producer Pascal Gabriel.

The trio were already known to me due to my ongoing obsession with all things released by Mute. I'd acquired two of their singles – 'On My Own' and 'From This Moment On' – from a stall in the central courtyard at the University of Essex, where I was studying. Those two singles were both poignant, heartbreaking songs. Each and every synth sound seemed to be freighted with heavy emotion, while Lamb's vocal was as devastating and stirring as the very best torch singers.

It took me a long time before I purchased 'Audiopeach', regrettably the only album that Lamb, Statham and Gabriel ever recorded together. A sticker on the front of my CD tells me I bought this from a branch of Cash Converters. I don't remember which, but I do remember playing it and feeling a little like it was too adjacent to the upbeat Europop dominating parts of the 1990s musical landscape at the time. It went into the rack and there it languished until a few years ago, when I was preparing to chat to Gabriel about his Stubbleman project.

Something that I'd have previously overlooked on a first listen, like 'Deep Down Together' with its thunderously hard 4/4 rhythms, sinewy 'I Feel Love' synth sequence and soulful backing vocals from Billy Mackenzie, connects with me in a different way today. I hear rapture and euphoria, passion and urgency, nuance and subtlety where I previously only heard the urgent grid of beats. Elsewhere, the impassioned highlight that is 'Perfect World' rests atop a chunky break and jangly Balearic guitars, the perfect vehicle for an understated vocal from Lamb concerned with hurt and rejection.

Key to this album is undoubtedly its highly detailed production ethic – intricate Spector-esque layering, an ABBA-ish proficiency for heart-wrenching key changes – qualities that Statham and Gabriel would apply liberally to the artists they went on to work with. Any of the tracks could have been pop hits at the time. That they weren't remains a mystery, and that Peach didn't record a follow-up is an absolute tragedy.

MAT SMITH

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Cue Dot XIII: ReFabricated: Volume I

CUE DOT

Essential cuts remade and remodelled

Born out of the pandemic as a not-for-profit vehicle allowing artists to work and release collaboratively, how far this outstanding, genuinely unique British imprint has come in such a short time. The vision of founder Paul Scott, who encourages us to see the label as an ever-evolving project rather than anything too traditional, Cue Dot has managed, despite everything, to set quite the standard for new electronic music in the UK – "all created by human, machine and beautiful endeavour" – throughout these unnaturally testing times.

The label's output to date has comprised of single album releases in numbered sequence – 'The Cue Dot Series' – featuring different collaborating artists, who all control the content, under a consistent house style aesthetic that eschews any focus on the individual. This 13th release though, brings the "first phase" of the project to a close, but in exultant, celebratory fashion.

'ReFabricated' features every artist who has contributed to the series, including Lyndon Scarfe (who had the honour of releasing the very first album of this fabulous suite), SAD MAN & Francis Lowe, Veryan, R Seiliog, Scissorgun and Fragile X (aka J Gorecki). Each has taken a track from a fellow artist's Cue Dot output and reimagined it – hence the title. And for a bit of added value, there are also a couple of head-turning guest contributions that propel the source material into wild, hitherto unimagined territories.

Liverpool producer Lo Five remixes Manfred Hamil's minimal techno banger 'Asphyxiated' in fine haunted dancehall style, while 808 State's legendary techno innovator Graham Massey gives Scissorgun's indie-dance 'Tangie Biscotti' a strobing rerub, firing it out to the dancefloor to consume all in its wake.

Elsewhere, the opalescent beauty of Welsh producer and sound artist R Seiliog's 'Emerald Sylvan' is refined by Leeds' Buddhism-influenced composer Toby Wiltshire. Levitating high into the outer limits, it's a poised, elegantly judged and downright essential homage to his labelmate. What a way to end this compelling series.

CARL GRIFFIN

SALAMANDA
Ashbalkum
HUMAN PITCH

Can these Seoul producers do no wrong? Uman Therma and Yetsuby's third album in 18 months, this time on New York's Human Pitch, is a pitter-patter of pleasantries.

At its core are gently palmed drums – the meandering marimbas and toms are a radiantly sunny delight. Think Facta on a deck chair, Pantha Du Prince in flip-flops, or a sunblock-slathered Ultramarine. A soft bass adds affable depth, and a click snare introduces ultimate nod-ability.

These minimalist niceties are strengthened by carefully chosen vocal samples, half utterances that transport us to unnamed communities shaded by straw-roofed huts. A vocal highlight is the baby-ish babbling on the wonky reggaeton of 'Catching Tails'. If you think this is all too lyrical, it's worth finishing with the bustling 'Mad Cat Party'. This is – maybe – the only track in this reviews section that turns the plaintive miaows of a cat called Ringo into an irresistible ambient techno roller. Furry impressive. **FR**

MOUNT MAXWELL
Only Children / The People's Forest
HOTHAM SOUND

It's a 10,000-foot Canadian mountain in subarctic Yukon, but there's nothing remotely chilly about this brace of releases from Vancouver producer Jamie Tolagson. He assumed the name to create analogue explorations of his 1970s childhood, particularly the formative years he spent in a musician's commune halfway up said snowy peak. These are his fourth and fifth albums respectively, released on cassette in 2019 and 2021 but now given vinyl reissues.

'Only Children' is the more organic record, a fuzzy mish-mash of jumbled pre-school memories. The title track is worth the money alone – soft acoustic guitars accompany a tide of electronic melancholy, before surrendering to the sensory synth overload of 'Weird Places'.

'The People's Forest' feels like a natural progression, a disquieting ramble around rural British Columbia, with 'Ring Of Rushes' the haunted highlight. It's easy to assume a Boards Of Canada lineage, but the actual Film Board of Canada feels a more appropriate comparison for an artist who expertly embodies the faded 16mm ambience of unsettling childhood daydreams. **BF**

TANGERINE DREAM
La Divina Commedia
KSCOPE

Edgar Froese undoubtedly expanded minds in the 20th century, and in the 21st century, he expanded his own vision when he undertook the biggest project of his life. 'La Divina Commedia', or 'The Dante Trilogy', is a cosmic collection of some considerable magnitude, made in collaboration with Froese's second wife, artist Bianca Froese-Acquaye. Recorded over three double albums, it feels almost infinitely long at times.

'Inferno', 'Purgatorio' and 'Paradiso', originally released between 2004 and 2006, come together for the first time over six CDs, remastered by Froese's close collaborator Harald Pairits, with an additional 60-page hardback book.

For sheer scope, 'Purgatorio' offers the most thrills, rolling back towards the classic synth years on 'Sun Son's Seal (Part One)'. The baroque opera of the first album becomes wearing at times, and the soulful, pop-influenced songs on 'Paradiso' like 'Beyond Sodom And Gomorrah' don't always come off, but there are bewitching moments aplenty throughout. **JA**

FORGIVENESS
Next Time Could Be Your Last Time
GONDWANA

Three exceptional electronicists team up on this debut outing as Forgiveness – Jack Wyllie (Portico Quartet), soundtrack composer Richard Pike (PVT) and Lo Recordings' enigmatically monikered producer, JQ. Drawing on the current new wave of mystical ambient experimentalism, they fuse the organic tones of traditional woodwind instruments with analogue synths, and the euphoric moods, tones and textures conjured up here – all comfortingly warm and accessible – sound like little else around.

Together, they transport us to intoxicating and iridescent futurescapes. And though you might hear some of their collective influences, such as the flute-led Berlin School kosmische on 'Mountain Top', or the opalescent new-age motifs of Ocean Moon on 'Lost Fawn', the trio's symbiotic connection shines through. It's most prevalent on the thrillingly propulsive title track, the high point of this spellbinding album. **CG**

LOWLIFE
Diminuendo
LTM

There's a moment when the sweet melancholy of 'Diminuendo' knocks every atom of oxygen out of your body. Amazingly, it comes three seconds into the opening track, 'A Sullen Sky', as an icy synth sweeps over wonderfully melodic bass. What's more, I guarantee the oxygen thing will happen to you the first time you hear this record.

Originally released in 1987 and now reissued by those lovely people at LTM, 'Diminuendo' was the second album from Lowlife, a Scottish outfit whose line-up included former Cocteau Twin Will Heggie. Spinning at the intersection of post-punk, cold wave and dreampop, it's been a cult classic for 35 years. It's not hard to understand why – it really is a terrific album.

'A Sullen Sky' sets the tone. Heggie's bass is a majestic presence throughout, taking the lead on the likes of 'Ragged Rise To Tumbledown' and 'From Side To Side', while singer Craig Lorentson raises the bar with every song. He even edges into Billy Mackenzie territory on 'Big Uncle Ugliness'. Lorentson sadly died in 2010 at the age of just 44, but Lowlife had called it a day many years before then. Of their five albums, this is most probably their best and definitely one not to be missed. Trust me. **P**

ANDRÉ BRATTEN
Picture Music
SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

The cover of André Bratten's 'Picture Music' comprises bands of black, white and grey, like the screen of an old television that's losing its signal. The Oslo producer's sleeve notes describe the music within as "unrestrained by notions of style or genre", which is true – 'Ballroom' waltzes across a floor of ambient electronics, while 'Fold' glitches and chatters like the best stuff on Skam.

What binds it all, however, is a kind of post-Boards Of Canada analogue haze, but sharpened by chillier Scandinavian air. Where 2020's 'Silvester' revolved around amorphous and unsettling crunch, these pieces are built on substantial chunks of more melodic synth and, accordingly, feel closer to Bratten's 2019 album 'Pax Americana'.

However, the real gems on 'Picture Music' are the shorter vignettes scattered between the longer tracks. '22.02.1958' is a Mark Vernon-esque field recording of someone playing Beethoven's 'Für Elise', while 'Swim' sounds like BOC's 'Roygbiv' if it was about a sad robot. If this is picture music, then the images it depicts are subtly unsettling and deliciously fuzzy. **ST**

FIELD LINES CARTOGRAPHER

Dreamtides

CASTLES IN SPACE

Lancastrian soundscape master on a roll

"A strange coastline, a beach. A dream-world of hyper-vivid colours and a topography of regular geometric shapes, rather than natural forms. A sense of both peace and slight unease…". And then Mark Burford woke up, and he was in Lancaster. Still, he's lucky to be blessed by such rapturously impressionistic night-time reveries. The rest of us just have anxiety dreams about sitting naked at job interviews. Inspired, Burford has used the lurid seaside resort of his subconscious as the setting for a sprawling double album of appropriately somnambulant delights.

This is a restless summer's morning of an album. An album of 11am slumber, of guilty sunshine pouring through slatted blinds. A post-exams, pre-university doss of an album. It doesn't hurry, it lingers, idle and sluggish with a lazy day to kill. The opening track, 'Hexagon Sands At Low Tide', at 14 minutes long, is a plush comfort blanket of modular tinkles and the wail of some ancient, analogue mermaid. 'Golden Hour' adds sinister, low rumblings, the seductive growls of Morpheus on the prowl. Recording his tracks in the order they were written, Burford has created not so much a stream of consciousness as an ocean of unconsciousness.

Your bed is the vessel, drifting slowly past 'Octagon Dappled Shallows' with its cyclical bleeps and slow, rhythmic breaths. Past 'Sable Bay With Stars', a 13.5 tog duvet of a track, both comforting and suffocating. It's a record that often occupies the same elusive mental space as the bucolic flip-side of Eno's 'Before And After Science', where idle fingers brush the surface of sun-dappled seas. But by 'Purple Dusk Over Water' the darkness is creeping, and freezing tides of Moog arrive with disconcerting haste. The forecast? 'Rhomboid Storm Clouds', 12 minutes of relentlessly hypnotic pattering. Get back under the bedsheets with a brolly.

Burford himself is far from sleepy – this is his ninth Field Lines Cartographer album in barely six years. But it's the perfect encapsulation of the deep and sometimes disturbing repose of the blissfully indolent. While memories of real-life dreams wither beneath the grind of the everyday humdrum, 'Dreamtides' is an album that remains as hyper-vivid as the visions that inspired it. Hit the snooze button and descend into its charms.

BOB FISCHER

Label Profile

Label: Pont Neuf
Location: Paris
Est: 2016

Potted History: "Before launching the label I was organising parties in Paris for a little over two years in clubs like Social [formerly Triptyque, and now Sacré] or Wanderlust," explains Pont Neuf founder Thomas Prunier. "It was while doing these parties that I started to meet the first artists around whom I launched Pont Neuf Records to support their work as producers… and launched myself into the big time! I had absolutely no idea what running a label entailed, and learned everything on the job."

Mission Statement: "I didn't have a mission as such when I started the label, apart from having fun with these guys who have become my buddies over time," says Prunier. "But as the label evolved, I was able to meet a whole bunch of artists, like Tour-Maubourg, Vitess and THEOS, who joined the adventure from near and far. At the same time, a wave of young French artists started to make a name for themselves but without any proper support – which is a real concern in France, in terms of recognition of our new artists. Pont Neuf became a way to support this new scene and help it to emerge."

Key Artists & Releases: "For six years, we have released more than 30 projects with more than 20 artists on Pont Neuf, whether they are albums, EPs from young artists, or compilations gathering this scene together. It may sound like fake talk, but my mini triumph is making a young, independent electronic music label survive in a country that still pays too little attention to new scenes, while also enduring two years of the pandemic."

Future Plans: "There is always a plan," says Prunier. "New albums to come by the end of the year and into 2023. But there is also a big new compilation, 'Hexagonal Club Vol 3' – out in July – which I think is one of the biggest projects ever released on Pont Neuf, plus a lot of EPs. The identities of the artists behind these projects will remain secret for the moment. The dream is to be able to carry out the mission that the label has given itself, and on a personal level, to be able to travel with these artists and meet people with different cultures, visions and ideas. After that, I'll stop everything and set up a hut on a deserted beach – period!"

Any Other Business? "If I had to give one piece of advice," says Prunier, "it would be to always keep in mind that this is a job of passion – or a hobby, as it is for many of us – and that you have to know how to arm yourself artistically and with human patience and kindness. Everything will pay off with time if you don't give up. Thank you Mr TedX for letting me speak with you today!"

For more, see pontneuf.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

DJ and producer **Brian d'Souza**, aka Auntie Flo, shares the first and last records he bought, plus an all-time favourite

FIRST

MICHAEL JACKSON

Bad

EPIC, 1987

"Perhaps I'm not allowed to mention Michael Jackson now but this record really does hold a special place for me. Dancing around to it with my friends remains one of my earliest memories from childhood. Unlike Jackson's reputation, the music still stands the test of time."

LAST

DON CHERRY, NANA VASCONCELOS, COLLIN WALCOTT

The Codona Trilogy

ECM, 2008

"I've started buying CDs again and have been enjoying the process. I still need something physical to hold but was getting frustrated and a little lazy getting up to change the side of vinyl. The great thing about CDs is they open up a new world of music that I had been ignoring – the music of ECM Records, for example. This 3CD set is incredible and totally ahead of its time."

ALWAYS

RONI SIZE & REPRAZENT

New Forms

TALKIN' LOUD, 1997

"Due to my new CD player, I've been going through all my old CD collections at my mum's house and have found a ton of favourites that I hadn't listened to in years. One of those was Roni Size & Reprazent. The production is s-o-o-o good! Every track still sounds massively futuristic, a gateway to further possibilities and new sonic realms. Incredible."

AUNTIE FLO & SARATHY KORWAR

Shruti Dances

MAKE MUSIC

Meditative electronics, propulsive rhythms

Stepping into the arena with another artist is far easier these days than it's ever been. Not only do you not have to be in the same time zone anymore, our 21st century tools allow (and encourage) artistic get-togethers between people who don't even know one another prior to that initial mouse-click. You can only hope, however, that when you step off that creative cliff, your results will be as fluid as this new collaboration.

Put together around the idea of the seven swaras – or the seven fundamental notes in Indian Carnatic music – producer and DJ Auntie Flo (Brian d'Souza) and percussionist Sarathy Korwar combine forces to produce six tracks (shouldn't that be seven?) of South Asian-inspired electro/world explorations that veer from the hypnotic ('Ga') to the clubby ('Ni'). The first track, 'Dha', seems to get the balance right from the outset and, as it turns out, is actually the sound of the duo just getting going.

"'Dha' was effectively us just warming up!" reveals d'Souza. "It's the most exciting part of the process – plugging things in, breaking them, testing where the boundaries are, getting a feel for the potential."

Successful jams aside, what the pair mostly achieve here is a subtle shifting of the musical sands, enough to leave the listener not entirely sure where these vibes might be sourced from – like the psychedelic cowbell (or is it a tin can?) that drives 'Pa', or the underlying drones of 'Ma'. The latter is probably the Indian shruti box instrument which gives the album its title. Ultimately, what we wind up with here are deeply meditative, immersive layers of sound that feel as if they need to be revisited (on endless repeat) until something that's been nagging your consciousness has been binned.

It's clear that d'Souza and Korwar come at this shared adventure from different but solidly interlocking perspectives. The first as a globetrotting performer who was already wellies-deep into a new strand of club music and world influences, and the second as a first-rate rhythmist who is uber-keen on genre-hopping and experimentation. Once you've embarked on this wonderfully captivating ride, however, you might be asking what boundaries they can push up against next. Let's hope there's a 'Shruti Dances' volume two that holds the answer.

JOE SILVA

MOUNDABOUT
Flowers Rot, Bring Me Stones
ROCKET RECORDINGS

Gno figurehead Paddy Shine combines his formidable talents here with fellow Irishman and new folk innovator Phil Masterson, in a rather brilliant pagan-hued meditation on neolithic culture. Resonating throughout with a deep sense of devotional wonder, the album opens with the evocative acoustics of 'The Sea', a summoning of the elemental that is sustained throughout.

At times evoking 'Hosianna Mantra'-era Popol Vuh, subtle electronics work alongside field recordings and vocal manipulations in pastoral/cosmic fashion, particularly on the hypnotic 'Waste Of Peace'.

Everything culminates in the extraordinary 'Dick Dalys Dance'. A mesmeric, incanted improvisation that conjures up ritual and rite, it sonically interprets the complex spirals and art on ancient Celtic megaliths and burial mounds, echoing the droning, trance-inducing sensory experience that temple stones and chambers were built to amplify all those millennia ago. **CG**

YANN TIERSEN
11 5 18 2 5 18
MUTE

Electronically speaking, Yann Tiersen is on a roll. While last year's scintillating 'Kerber' long-player toyed with percolating ambience and textural soundscapes, '11 5 18 2 5 18' finds the Breton composer even more absorbed in electronics.

It's an album built on experimentation. Earlier this year, while preparing for a performance at Berlin's modular synth festival, Superbooth, Tiersen found time to tinker away in his Ushant studio, and this latest album is the typically immersive result. Eschewing the deft nuances of 'Kerber', it has a deeper, more resonant feel, as samples and "resamples" of his back catalogue – the numbered titles are a clue to the root tracks – are painstakingly tweaked and reprogrammed into new, unrecognisable shapes.

As always, it's exquisitely wrought, but this time with salient nods to the dancefloor. The opener, '11 5 18 2 5 18', comes on like an Orbital offcut, '16 1 12 5 19 20 9 14 5' is distinctly Kraftwerkian, and '1 18. 13 1 14 5 18. 11 15 26 8' swells into a pulsating, techno-ish banger. How very unexpected – and decidedly glorious. **VI**

COOL MARITIME
Big Earth Energy
WESTERN VINYL

Having defined the West Coast modular-ambient wave in just a few releases, producer Sean Hellfritsch takes a back-to-basics turn here, referencing the tinkling sequences and bold keyboard brass sounds of 1970s electronics.

Just as the title itself displays an unabashed sincerity, so does the music, with the likes of 'Soft Fascination' and the gushing 'Avian Glide' wearing their blissed-out sentimentalism on their respective sleeves. It's possibly a bit too sickly sweet for some tastes, but go with the general good mood and you'll find it's easy enough to get carried along with the best moments.

The sunny-sounding 'Secret Of The Megafauna', for instance – reminiscent of the classic early 90s chill-out room glories of Pete Namlook or Global Communication. Closing track 'Apex', meanwhile, could be Japan jamming with Mixmaster Morris – grandiose without being pompous, and a suitably big end to an ambitiously themed album. **BW**

RÖYKSOPP
Profound Mysteries
DOG TRIUMPH

If Röyksopp promised to leave behind the album format in 2014, then eight years later they've not only embraced it again but also demonstrated how it should be done. The first side of 'Profound Mysteries' builds steadily like a jet traversing a runway for take off, commencing with perturbation on the opening track, '(Nothing But) Ashes…', rising on 'The Ladder', soaring to a climax with Alison Goldfrapp's remarkable falsetto on 'Impossible' – one of the finest and most atmospheric singles of the year – before plateauing at 30,000 feet with another banger, 'This Time, This Place…'. And that's just the first four tracks taken care of.

The Norwegian duo have sought out other ways to express themselves and collaborate around their sixth studio album, with 'Profound Mysteries' promising to become an ever-expanding universe. After 2014's diffident 'The Inevitable End', Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland appear to have their mojo back. Now they're musical amanuenses, transcribing a cast of fabulous muses, taking their own warm, wintery electronica to its highest plane yet. **JA**

ACID TWILIGHT
Mustang Zodiac
NOT NOT FUN

This second volume of organ amblings by Buenos Aires' "underground entity" Acid Twilight demands your wavering – very wavering – attention. Its hallucinatory tones are rooted in the wilds of South America, "played outdoors under cryptic constellations".

The animals in this 'Zodiac' include a carpet of chirping electronic crickets, a hooting owl and more than a hint of snake-charming, thanks to its dustings of desert vibes. Fuzzed synths meet soft circles of melody and, with lackadaisical delight, heroically lethargic handclaps on 'Love Parade'. 2021's 'S/T' album used rattles, bells and an indigenous war flute. Fewer instruments are specified this time, but its native sounds are an essential part of its (literally) organic delight.

'Mustang Zodiac' cumulates with the lingering 'Up To The Tower Of Silence', in which stillwater-muffled arpeggios lurk beneath mulches of ambient algae, before being transported at the end by shroomy oscillations. Very nice. A new, trippy chapter in the outdoors of perception. **FR**

MERZBOW
Animal Liberation:
Until Every Cage Is Empty
COLD SPRING

There are something like 500 Merzbow albums and this one is 49 minutes of "total noise". Around seven minutes into 'No Cages Part 2', the face-melting jet engine roar of the previous 15 minutes briefly stumbles and stutters, before Masami Akita (he's been Merzbow on his tod since 1999) opens the throttle again. 'Part 3' then boils up another repulsive stew of noise, albeit filtered slightly differently.

By this point, you may fancy you're starting to hear faraway melody and rhythm in the chaos. But it's almost certainly just your poor brain's overloaded processing unit, trying to make sense of what you're putting it through – a high-stress, horror-show version of seeing faces in clouds.

Here, it feels like you're being invited to understand mechanical meat recovery from the wrong side. 'Until Every Cage Is Empty' is essentially a vegan cry of rage about the treatment of animals. Buried in the full-frequency assault is the theory that Covid sprang from so-called wet markets, and that in our mistreatment of animals lies our own annihilation. **MR**

KLAUS SCHULZE

Deus Arrakis

SPV

Electronic pioneer's moving final album

It seems oddly fitting that Klaus Schulze's last album should revisit territory – namely a distant planet – that occupied his thoughts earlier in his solo electronic music career. In 1979, Schulze released 'Dune', inspired by Frank Herbert's science fiction novels. Schulze consumed those books voraciously, and his resulting album was arranged with the same sort of suspenseful, elongated drama and mystique that Herbert sprinkled across his writing. Split into two 30-minute tracks full of ephemeral synthesisers and subtle rhythms, 'Dune' was rounded out by adaptable contributions from cellist Wolfgang Tiepold and vocals from Whitby's self-proclaimed "God Of Hellfire", Arthur Brown.

Just as director Denis Villeneuve's 2021 'Dune' film was not a remake of David Lynch's problematic 1984 adaption, 'Deus Arrakis' is neither a reboot or a sequel. The album's genesis came from Schulze re-reading Herbert's series and finding new inspiration with which to work. Around the time he was poring over the books again, Villeneuve's movie was announced and with it, his chosen soundtrack composer, Hans Zimmer. A lifelong Schulze fan, Zimmer got in touch, and parts of what became 'Deus Arrakis' were blended in with his own score.

The album's title translates as 'God Arrakis', referring to the planet upon which 'Dune' was set, and consists of three typically lengthy tracks full of mesmeric and immersive electronic music. Unlike the 1979 album, with its wispy, ethereal synths, opening opus 'Osiris (Parts 1-4)' is much more purposeful in its direction, built up from staccato arpeggios and resonant, persuasive bass tones.

When Schulze started recording the album, he discovered some unused recordings of Tiepold's cello, which appear on the epic 'Seth', creating one of the only stylistic links back to 'Dune'. Segmented into seven parts, 'Seth' begins with wild spirals of sound, almost like Schulze is sonically approximating an Arrakis sandstorm, before the episodic tone poem moves through various scenes, from maudlin folk to submerged rhythms and electro-orchestral grandiosity.

It wasn't intentional, but the third piece here – 'Der Hauch Des Lebens' ('The Breath Of Life') – has a poignancy when considered in the context of Schulze's recent passing. Split into five parts, it's here that we find the Meister at his most sweetly melodic, with clusters of euphoric notes assembled like his myriad achievements, before fading into saddening quietude.

MAT SMITH

SPIRITUALIZED

Everything Was Beautiful

FAT POSSUM

Orchestral space rockers hit the spot

Just as Spiritualized's 2018 album 'And Nothing Hurt' ended with morse code spelling out the album title, so this one kicks off with the same plaintive blips, this time signifying 'Everything Was Beautiful'. At first glance, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this record is a companion piece, picking up where the last one left off. And you'd be almost right – the two titles combine to form a quote from Kurt Vonnegut's dazzling 1969 anti-war novel 'Slaughterhouse 5', and the songs come from the same pool of demos.

Jason Pierce (aka J Spaceman) intended those demo tracks to become a double album but was talked out of it, and as a result he's moved on. Sure, his characteristic meticulous blending of experimental, overblown gospel, garage rock, soul and country is all here but there's been an evolution of sound and approach that imbues this record with a new vitality.

The opener, 'Always Together With You', is a huge, technicolor, Spector-ish recasting of the admittedly big-sounding version that appeared on 2014's 'The Space Project' compilation. Elsewhere, the maximalism that Pierce frequently defaults to is noticeable by its absence. The spare lament of 'Crazy' and 'Best Thing You Never Had (The D Song)' are infectious combinations of drone, propulsive percussion and bass. While completely different in sound, they have an unadorned directness in common. True, you'll be hard-pressed to find subtlety across this album – this is Spiritualized, after all – but it feels like J Spaceman is giving the instruments some, well, space. Even the two free jazz freakouts in 'The A Song (Laid In Your Arms)' feel more expressive than many previous Spiritualized epics.

The key track is the final, 10-minute-long 'I'm Coming Home Again'. A simple repeated garage rock riff low in the mix gives it a pulsing drive, before a bassline – part glissando, part staccato – slinks in. The full sonic apocalypse seems constantly imminent. But, while it remains tantalisingly close, it never comes.

Restraint is a virtue seldom celebrated in music, but when skilfully wielded, it has an unparalleled power to get under our skin. This is no mere subsidiary effort – rather, 'Everything Was Beautiful' boasts a rare vibrancy that speaks of renewal rather than retread.

ANTHONY THORNTON

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
VELIMIR ILIC,
ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH,
BEN MURPHY,
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FAT ROLAND,
MARK ROLAND,
JOE SILVA,
MAT SMITH,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

Our back-page columnist reveals his incredible knowledge of football. And pies. Actually, it is more pies than football, to be honest

WORDS AND PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

Fat Roland, how did you get so good at kickplaying soccer football sport? Thanks for asking, reader.

I suppose it's my natural athleticism. My thighs are like tree trunks. Big trees, that is, not the saplings I kick over for fun when I'm in my local park stealing ducks. My biceps are oiled and curvy, like a pack of Quavers sucked wetly smooth by a labrador. In school sports, I was put in my own special team that had to stand in a corner. This is because of my many sportsing achievements. The shortest ever long jump. A four-hour mile. Most darts thrown in netball. If 'The Guinness Book Of Records' did a school sports edition, there would be a photograph of me on every page, with the words FRAT ROLEND scrawled in crayon underneath. They really should get a proof reader.

My creepy Uncle Bartholematthew took me to footsoccer matches as a kid. He'd roll down his van window and say, "I'll give you these vinegar bon-bons if you come with me to West Dumplington Rangers versus Forfar Thistle United in the Stockport Hat Museum Juniors Division". I don't remember much about those games because, along with discovering footishball, I also found out that the stadiums sold pies. Beef and ale. Cheese and onion. Chicken lips and gristle. I'd chomp down a couple of dozen per game and, if we won, we celebrated down the chippy. Pie and chips. Pie and mushy peas. Pie and pie. Vinegar bon-bons for afters.

The first soccer team I footballed in was with Siouxsie And The Banshees. I was the striker and Siouxsie Sioux was in defence. We put all the Banshees between us. There was John as wingman, then John as half tackle, then John in right guard (anti-perspirant), then John as flank startler (dribbling only). That left John as camel toe and John as aggressive bottom, with John playing VAR (Very Attractive Referee). That left all the other Johns wandering aimlessly on the pitch, squeezing orange segments into their eyes and hanging from the goalposts like bats. I later also formed a football team with New Order, but John (Barnes) wouldn't shut up. And Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert refused to play unless they were tied together like in a three-legged race.

As everyone knows, I went on to win loads of World Cups and Conference Leagues and Penalty Boxes and FA Cups and Cycling Proficiency Tests. I don't want to go into detail here because I am humble like Muhammad Ali or God. Let's just say I am so amazingly excellent at footballering, Walkers Crisps have asked me to become spokesRoland for crisps. They're going to rebrand all of their flavours. Ready Salted will become Ready Fat Rolanded. Cheese and Onion will become Cheese and Onion and Fat Roland. Prawn Cocktail will have all the prawns taken out and replaced with tiny naked Fat Rolands, as pink and fishy as their predecessors. Have I got crisps right? I'm not used to crisps. I only really eat pies.

My soccer success has not gone unnoticed in the electronic music community. Let's consult 'The Guinness Book Of British Hit Singles' and see which musical artists have led the field in footie-techno crossovers inspired by my sporting achievements. Dario G? DJ Otzi? Jean-Michel Jarre and Apollo 440?! Jeez, it's like a jukebox has had a stroke. I was hoping Kraftwerk had a track called 'Euros Endless' or Pet Shop Boys had done 'Ballways On My Mind'. Is it too much to ask for Warp Records to sign acts called Boards Of Eric Canadatona or Two Lone Scoredsmen?

And yes, I can think of these brilliant ideas because I am so very good at kicksporting football soccer game matches.

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